

Consultation on a “Collaborative Programme to Assess and Monitor Climate-related changes in Marine Ecosystems in Tropical/Sub-tropical Regions and in the High Seas using the Research Vessel “Dr Fridtjof Nansen”

IOC/UNESCO, Paris, France

5 and 6 September 2012

Introduction

Climate change is expected to have significant consequences for the oceans and their resources and some have already been documented. Detailed knowledge on the impacts of climate change on the marine environment and fishery resources is essential to enable coastal countries to take these impacts into consideration in their planning and as a way to increase their resilience. Climate change related impacts add to others resulting from drivers such as fishing, pollution from land-based activities and oil exploitation at sea, with possible dramatic but poorly documented changes, particularly so in developing countries. It has been proposed that any future phase of the EAF-Nansen project should deal with the challenge of climate change and surveys conducted with the research vessel “Dr Fridtjof Nansen” will have to be multidisciplinary in nature to serve the needs of the countries and other partners. It has been proposed that the vessel should provide a common platform for UN agencies with competencies in marine and climate related issues to work together in a collaborative way towards related objectives.

In November 2011, FAO, through the EAF-Nansen project, approached IOC/UNESCO for a possible partnership for future phases of the EAF-Nansen project, to study climate-related changes in the oceans around developing countries using the *R/V Dr Fridtjof Nansen*. It was agreed that a meeting would be held involving all relevant UN agencies with competencies in climate change and the oceans. The IOC Executive Secretary, Dr Wendy Watson-Wright, offered to host the follow-up meeting at IOC Headquarters in Paris.

Preliminary ideas for the proposed programme

At the COP 15 of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in 2009, the over 320 participants of the Oceans Day event stressed the need to address threats faced by coastal communities, especially in developing nations and SIDS as a result of the effect of climate change on the world’s oceans. It was noted that since climate change is a global issue observations to understand the nature and effect of the changes should also take place in oceans bordering developing nations (obvious victims of climate change). The research capacity needs of developing countries also have to be addressed.

A number of questions in relation to climate change and impact on the oceans, including the following, need to be addressed.

- How will productivity be affected by climate change?
- How is climate change affecting the distribution and abundance of marine species and communities?
- Where are sensitive areas or hotspots of change?
- What tools are available – especially in developing countries – to monitor changes in marine ecosystems?
- Which marine species will be the best sentinels of climate change impacts? They could include corals and kelp, or species with key ecological roles such as phytoplankton.

- How would reduction in non-climate related stress increase ecosystem resilience to climate change?
- To what extent will marine climate change impacts affect socially and economically developing countries?

The programme under discussion “Assessing and Monitoring Climate-related changes in Marine Ecosystems in Tropical/Sub-tropical Regions and in the High Seas” is expected to contribute to answering the above questions. It is intended to set baselines and develop a system to monitor marine ecosystems in change as a result of climate variability and other drivers of change such as fisheries and pollution.

Objective of the Meeting

The two-day meeting in Paris is to explore ideas on the following:

1. What on-going related programmes do partners have?
2. Considering other international initiatives on climate change and marine ecosystems, what will a new programme look like and in what way can it best complement ongoing efforts?
3. Are the parties prepared to work together on a common programme with a development objective?
4. What will be the nature of the partnership?
5. What are the required inputs and possible sources of funding?
6. Will there be a need to establish a multi-agency taskforce to develop the idea?

Participants

The following organizations and programmes are to be represented in the consultation:

1. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO)
2. Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO
3. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
4. United Nations Development Organization (UNDP)
5. The Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection (GESAMP)
6. Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socio-economic Aspects
7. GEF/IW and GEF/Climate Change
8. Institute of Marine Research of Bergen, Norway
9. Caucus of African Large Marine Ecosystem programmes
10. UN Oceans
11. International Atomic Energy Agency Marine Environment Laboratories, Monaco
12. The Nansen Environmental and Remote Sensing Center, Bergen, Norway
13. Climate change adaptation funds
14. IOC Sub-Commission for Africa and the Adjacent Islands
15. Global Partnership for Climate, Fisheries and Aquaculture (PaCFA)