

**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific****Seventy-sixth session**

Bangkok, 21 May 2020

Item 5 (j) of the provisional agenda\*

**Review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for  
Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific: statistic****Achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 on life below  
water: accounting for our oceans****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

The present document is intended to inform the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific of activities in pursuit of the advancement of statistics on oceans and strengthened related capacities in the region. The document contains the results of pilot projects to develop ocean accounts in China, Malaysia, Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam, and an outline of the utility of ocean accounts for policy-relevant information and analysis. Data gaps, challenges in data sharing and integration and other constraints for further work are presented, together with suggestions for future regional collaboration to strengthen ocean accounting for the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life below water).

The Commission may wish to note the progress made and express interest in contributing to the achievement of Goal 14 in the region, for example by funding or engaging in additional pilot activities in pursuit of the advancement of statistics on oceans and strengthened capacities for planning the sustainable development of ocean resources.

**I. Introduction**

1. The ocean is a vital source of livelihood, employment, nutrition and economic growth. Healthy oceans and marine ecosystems contribute to inclusive development and poverty reduction, regulate the climate and are essential for a more sustainable future. However, owing to widespread marine pollution, ocean acidification and warming, depletion of fish stocks and species, destructive fishing practices, unsustainable trade and transport, and inadequate marine governance, the health of oceans and coastal ecosystems has drastically deteriorated.

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\* ESCAP/76/L.1/Rev.1.

2. At the global level, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 14 serve as a framework for national efforts to conserve, restore and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for development. The United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14: Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, held in June 2017, committed to halting and reversing the decline in the health and productivity of the ocean and its ecosystems and protecting and restoring the ocean's resilience and ecological integrity.

3. The sustainable management of ocean resources and the development of statistical capacities for effective and inclusive decisions about the ocean are the focus of several recent Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) resolutions. In its resolution 73/5, the Commission encouraged member States to continue to enhance their capacity to sustainably manage the oceans and requested the secretariat to support current and new regional partnerships for enhancing data and statistical capacities for Goal 14 in the region. In its resolution 72/9, the Commission called for greater cooperation, collaboration and coordination between subregions and regional organizations and requested the secretariat to undertake an assessment of the capacity development needs of the countries in the region for the achievement of Goal 14. In its resolution 72/6, the Commission requested the secretariat to strengthen support to member States in their efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda in an integrated approach, inter alia, with analytical products, technical services and capacity-building initiatives through knowledge-sharing products and platforms, and to enhance data and statistical capacities.

4. Although substantial information on the ocean and its resources exists, the Governments of countries with the greatest need have the least capacity to access and apply this information in their policy decisions, and information is fragmented among numerous institutions nationally, regionally and internationally. There is not currently a standard approach for integrating diverse data on the ocean, nor is there a forum for the regional exchange of information and best practices with regard to integrated ocean statistics and policies. This prevents evidence-based programming and the optimal use of resources. At its forty-ninth session, the Statistical Commission adopted its decision 49/110 (March 2018), in which it requested that ocean statistics be integrated in the work of the revision process of the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and noted the interest of ESCAP and the United Nations Environment Programme in taking the lead in that work. In that regard, ESCAP has been pursuing the development of statistical guidelines and methods to improve ocean data and statistics.

5. The project on strengthening statistical capacity to achieve Goal 14 in selected ESCAP member States was developed to respond to global, regional and national calls for support in closing information and capacity gaps by means of enhanced partnerships and integrated data and statistics for Goal 14 and other ocean-related Goals, targets and indicators. The project was focused on the following areas: (a) enhancing partnerships on ocean-related statistics and governance; (b) providing statistical guidance on ocean accounting; and (c) building national capacities to pilot and apply the use of ocean accounts to address national ocean policy priorities.

6. In the following sections, an introduction to ocean accounts and their utility for policy-relevant analysis is given, and the results of the above-mentioned project are presented. Results of the pilot work in China, Malaysia, Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam are outlined to further illustrate the utility of

ocean accounts and exemplify routes towards improved ocean statistics that other Governments may wish to take. In addition, data gaps, data sharing and integration challenges, and other areas for further work are presented, together with suggestions for future regional collaboration to strengthen ocean accounting for the achievement of Goal 14.

## **II. What are ocean accounts?**

7. An ocean account is a structured compilation of consistent and comparable information, namely maps, statistics and indicators, concerning marine and coastal environments and related social circumstances and economic activity. Ocean accounts are compatible with relevant international statistical standards and approaches including the System of National Accounts, the System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) Central Framework, SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting and the Framework for the Development of Environment Statistics.

8. The general purpose of ocean accounts is to inform and enable policymaking, analysis and research on oceans. Ocean accounts provide coherent structures for standardizing fragmented data to produce reliable integrated indicators that are relevant to policymakers, including but not limited to the indicators for Goal 14 and other ocean-related Goals. The accounts can be visualized through infographics and maps displaying easily interpreted ocean information that is consistent and comparable across time and space to facilitate integrated ocean management.

9. Ocean accounts are designed to support the coherent and holistic reporting and assessment of the wide range of social, economic and environmental conditions related to oceans. This broad perspective is intended to be consistent with the practical information requirements of decision-making for sustainable development.

## **III. Piloting ocean accounts**

10. National pilot studies on ocean accounts were conducted in China, Malaysia, Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam. The pilot studies were guided by the following process: (a) establishing or strengthening existing interdepartmental working groups to assess national ocean priorities, governance mechanisms and data availability; (b) identifying priority pilot topics; (c) compiling and harmonizing available data; and (d) documenting and disseminating results.

11. Critical to the success of the five pilot studies were the strong institutional collaboration and commitment of national stakeholders combined with the active engagement of various professionals, including scientists, statisticians and policy specialists. The participatory approach ensured that the accounts produced were of immediate relevance to policymakers and helped to strengthen or establish national mechanisms as anchors for further work on integrated statistics for the sustainable management of ocean resources.

### **Objectives and results of pilot studies**

12. The pilot study in China was focused on developing harmonized mangrove maps for an improved understanding of the environmental assets of the mangrove ecosystems in Beihai Bay, one of the country's important marine ecological sites. The pilot study supported the Government's ecological civilization policy, emphasizing natural resource accounting as a governance

measure. According to the results, mangrove areas have expanded from 4.68 km<sup>2</sup> to 32.79 km<sup>2</sup> over 30 years with an estimated total carbon stock of 0.67 million tons.

13. The pilot study in Malaysia was focused on examining food security risk (namely fish) along the Straits of Malacca under climate variability as a critical assessment of the national sustainable ocean economy policy. The findings suggested that the primary productivity of oceans was more sensitive than land to climate change and that mangrove loss had had an impact on some fish species.

14. The pilot studies in Samoa, Thailand and Viet Nam were focused on addressing sustainable tourism policy issues by linking tourism income, natural resource use, land-based pollution and ecosystem impacts.

15. In Samoa, the pilot study was focused on developing the country's first-ever tourism satellite accounts, linking them with existing SEEA accounts for water and energy. The results indicated that in 2018, while tourism accounted for 12.4 per cent of gross domestic product and 21.5 per cent of employment, it was responsible for 11.5 per cent of water use and 10.1 per cent of electricity.

16. Thailand already had well-developed tourism satellite accounts but no SEEA accounts. Thus, the pilot study took the form of a case study of the main tourist destinations in southern Thailand (Phuket, Krabi, Phang Nga, Trang and Satun) which generated a total income of \$16 billion in 2016. The findings highlighted that although only one in nine persons in the five provinces was a tourist, tourism accounted for 21 per cent of water use, 57 per cent of energy use, 26 per cent of waste generation and 28 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions. The mapping of areas with high tourism potential, areas at risk and sites for conservation has also been initiated.

17. In Viet Nam, Quang Ninh province was selected as the subject of a case study in the development of comprehensive ecosystem accounts with a focus on pollution and tourism. The findings suggested an association between mangrove, seagrass and coral reef loss and human-induced factors such as land conversion, aquaculture practices, land-based pollution from tourism and sea-based pollution. The pilot study was extended to develop a preliminary marine spatial plan for the province as a direct policy application of ocean accounts.

18. The pilot studies serve as examples of the practical use of the ocean accounts framework to guide the harmonization, standardization and integration of ocean-related data to inform national policy priorities.

#### **IV. Partnerships to advance ocean accounting**

19. Commitments and partnerships are required for ocean accounts to be developed and used as a framework for the policy-focused integration of data and statistics. In June 2019, ESCAP and the University of New South Wales founded the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership as a coordination and communication structure for diverse institutions with a shared interest in ensuring that the values and benefits of oceans are recognized and accounted for in decision-making about social and economic development.<sup>1</sup> The Partnership aims to achieve this objective by developing an agreed technical framework for ocean accounting, coupled with collaborative capacity-building activities on the

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.oceanaccounts.org](http://www.oceanaccounts.org).

development, maintenance and use in decision-making of ocean accounts that link social, environmental and economic statistics.

20. The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership engages with the High-level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.<sup>2</sup> The Partnership organized its inaugural Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting and first annual meeting, in Sydney, Australia, in November 2019, with support from the World Bank Blue Economy Programme.<sup>3</sup> As of December 2019, the Partnership counted eight formal members: Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security; Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa; ESCAP; Fisheries and Oceans Canada; Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment, Viet Nam; United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; University of New South Wales; and the University of Ottawa.<sup>4</sup>

### **Draft technical guidance on ocean accounting for sustainable development**

21. One of the key goals of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership is the development of draft technical guidance on ocean accounting for sustainable development, which includes the following elements: a description of a statistical framework for compiling ocean-related data, statistics and indicators in a consistent, comparable and coherent manner; guidance on building ocean accounts compatible with the System of National Accounts, the SEEA Central Framework and SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting; and ocean account use cases for policymaking.

22. The development of the draft technical guidance began with the identification of nine key technical issues at the Asia and the Pacific regional expert workshop on ocean accounts, held in August 2018.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the publication has undergone several iterations, over the course of which these nine issues have been tested, elaborated and, in some cases, resolved. The work has benefited from feedback from global experts, the results of the five above-mentioned pilot studies and the review and deliberations at the Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting.

23. The latest version of the draft technical guidance on ocean accounting for sustainable development (version 0.8) is available on the ESCAP Regional Ocean Accounts Platform, together with ocean account training materials and contributing research studies such as the global ocean data inventory, mapping global ocean ecosystems and Asia-Pacific marine spatial planning snapshot 2009–2019.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See [www.oceanpanel.org](http://www.oceanpanel.org).

<sup>3</sup> See [www.unescap.org/events/global-dialogue-ocean-accounting-and-first-annual-meeting-global-ocean-accounts-partnership](http://www.unescap.org/events/global-dialogue-ocean-accounting-and-first-annual-meeting-global-ocean-accounts-partnership).

<sup>4</sup> The World Bank and several additional institutions are in the process of becoming formal members of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership.

<sup>5</sup> See [www.unescap.org/events/asia-and-pacific-regional-expert-workshop-ocean-accounts](http://www.unescap.org/events/asia-and-pacific-regional-expert-workshop-ocean-accounts).

<sup>6</sup> Available at <http://communities.unescap.org/node/1144/view>.

## **V. What's next?**

24. The membership of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership is expected to expand significantly in 2020 to support ongoing ocean accounting activities and further the interest of the 18 Governments that were represented at the Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting. Partnership activities in 2020 will be supported by the World Bank Blue Economy Programme.

25. Through the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership, ESCAP, the University of New South Wales and partners will continue to provide capacity-building support to Governments interested in further developing, testing and experimenting with the ocean accounts framework. The Partnership is also pursuing additional pilot projects, expansions of existing pilot projects and the embedding of ocean accounts in ocean development planning and policy.

26. Version 1.0 of the draft technical guidance on ocean accounting for sustainable development is scheduled for release prior to the second Global Dialogue on Ocean Accounting, which will be hosted by Fisheries and Oceans Canada and Statistics Canada in Ottawa in October 2020. Meanwhile, ESCAP has transmitted version 0.8 to the Statistical Commission for review at its fifty-first session, to be held in New York in March 2020, in the context of the ongoing revision of SEEA Experimental Ecosystem Accounting. Relevant parts of the draft technical guidance are expected to be considered by the Committee of Experts on Environmental-Economic Accounting at its fifteenth session, in July 2020.

27. The Global Ocean Accounts Partnership will also continue to play an active role in supporting the High-level Panel for a Sustainable Ocean Economy and related processes leading to the World Ocean Summit, to be held in Tokyo in March 2020, and the United Nations Ocean Conference, to be held in Lisbon in June 2020.

## **VI. Issues for consideration by the Commission**

28. The Commission may wish to take note of the progress made, provide advice and views on the planned next steps and express support for continued regional collaboration to strengthen ocean accounting.

29. Members States may wish to express their interest in becoming formal members of the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership and their commitment to contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 14 in the region, for example by funding or engaging in additional pilot activities in pursuit of the advancement of statistics on oceans and strengthened capacities for planning the sustainable development of ocean resources.

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