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United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
PO Box 30552, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: (254 20) 621 234
Fax: (254 20) 623 927
e-mail: cpinfo@unep.org
www.unep.org

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Director of Publication: Eric Falt
Editor: Geoffrey Lean
Coordinators: Naomi Poulton, Elisabeth Waechter
Special Contributor: Nick Nuttall
Circulation Manager: Manyahlesha Kebede
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KLAUS TOEPFER
United Nations
Under-Secretary-
General and
Executive Director,
UNEP

Thirty years ago the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP) was born, helping to foster a UNEP Regional Seas Programme that now encompasses 18 regions and over 140 coastal states and territories.

One of the programme's pillars is the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Sources of Pollution (UNEP/GPA), which aims to cut pollution of the world's oceans and seas from the land. For while the seas and oceans cover just over 70 per cent of the globe, it is the nearly 30 per cent of the earth's surface where humans live that are the main threat to their health and well-being.

Some 80 per cent of all marine pollution comes from the land. There are now estimated to be 150 dead zones in the world's oceans and seas, mainly resulting from the run-off of agricultural and other wastes, and emissions from land-based factories and vehicles.

This is the situation facing the Mediterranean, as it is with the other regional seas. So I am delighted that in this 30th MAP anniversary year, I can truly say that our Regional Seas Programme and the GPA are back in business and stronger and more focused than for a long time.

Strengthening the Regional Seas Programme will greatly help to deliver the Millennium Development Goals, whose five year review was undertaken by heads of state in New York in September: water and sanitation, for example, link directly to the marine environment. It is also crucial for meeting the World Summit on Sustainable Development's Plan of Implementation as it relates to such issues as health, fisheries and marine protected areas.

The Mediterranean is one of the world's most culturally diverse and populous regions. Its rich and favourable climate has made it a magnet for settlement, while just under one third of international tourism focuses on it.

It is also a special sea with unique

challenges. Its average depth is just 1,500 metres.

Mediterranean Waters take over a century to be renewed through the Strait of Gibraltar and relatively high evaporation rates make it saltier than the Atlantic. It joins the coastlines of countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, making it politically, economically and geographically complex as well as environmentally special and diverse.

MAP's initiatives have been a beacon and agenda-setter for many other regional seas.

It has played a key role in establishing more than 120 protected areas and in creating four action plans to protect endangered species including the monk seal, dolphins, porpoises and turtles.

Strong links have been developed with other regional bodies including the UN Economic Commission for Europe, the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the General Fisheries Commission for the Mediterranean.

In praising the MAP – and the Barcelona Convention that gives its work legal authority – we also acknowledge that much of its activities would not have been possible without financial investment from the multi-billion dollar Global Environment Facility (GEF).

I sincerely hope that governments back a full and secure replenishment of the GEF for the sake of the Mediterranean, regional seas generally – and the whole global environment.

Existing and planned GEF projects in the region include the Lake Ohrid project; the Lake Manzala wetlands scheme, the El Kala National Park and Wetlands management project, and the Gulf of Gabes marine and coastal resources protection initiative. Wider ranging ones cover such issues as oil pollution, shared waters and their management, identifying and eliminating regional pollution 'hot spots', and conserving biologically important sites throughout the Mediterranean.

The GEF has also helped MAP to join hands not just with environment ministries, but with other relevant ministries and actors in the region and helped promote national ownership of both it and the Barcelona Convention. Such ownership is vital for the long term success of regional seas everywhere ■