

SOUTH ASIAN CORAL REEF TASK FORCE

Constitution

Rationale

The South Asia region was ranked the lowest in the world in terms of declared marine and coastal protected areas in the 2003 United Nations List of Protected Areas. In addition, the inclusion of essential coral reef habitat in MCPA provisions is minimal, making the Indian Ocean, with its wealth of coral reefs, seagrasses, and mangrove forests, perhaps the most poorly protected ocean. As a result, the degradation of coastal and marine resources continues at an unprecedented rate, and despite current protection measures, one third to half of the coral reefs of South Asia are now effectively dead, and a further 30% threatened.

The 2004 Status of Coral Reefs of the World report identified the major factors contributing to the continued resource degradation at MCPA sites encompassing coral reef habitats, prior to the Indian Ocean Tsunami event. This report specified limited interagency and governmental cooperation as an inhibitor to effective resource management across the South Asia region and recommended the introduction of overlapping and complementary mandates.

To improve marine and coastal resource management effectiveness in the South Asia region, stronger institutional links are needed across sectors, between policy developers and grassroots communities, for improved information exchanges, greater representation of stakeholders in management decision-making processes, and the effective implementation of identified national and regional priorities.

The establishment of a regional coordinating body to facilitate the implementation of regional and international initiatives in the management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and to promote collaborative action, and transboundary responses to shared environmental challenges, was endorsed by South Asia Caucus participants at the 3rd International Tropical Marine Ecosystems Management Symposium, in Cozumel, Mexico, October 2006.

Response

The South Asia Cooperative Environment Programme (SACEP), in collaboration with the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN) and other partners, is tasked with the implementation of the European Union (EU) funded project 'Institutional Strengthening and capacity development for the long-term management of MCPAs encompassing coral reefs in South Asia'. This project commenced implementation in 2006, in the 5 maritime nations of South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka). In response to the regionally identified needs, the project will support the establishment of the South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF). Official endorsement of the South Asia Coral Reef Task Force was received from each of the 5 country governments participating in the project, at the SACEP Governing Council Meeting in January 2007.

Following extensive consultation with key regional stakeholders, Terms of Reference (TOR) for the operation of the SACRTF, and supporting documentation to finalise the role, purpose and structure of the SACRTF has been developed. The SACRTF constitution and description, outlined below, will be presented for endorsement by the participants of the first meeting of the SACRTF to be held on the 26th July 2007, in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

South Asia Coral Reef Task Force (SACRTF)

A suite of management plans, policies, and national and international strategies exist to support the management of marine and coastal resources in the South Asia region. However, the realisation of policy and strategies at the ground level is often poor. The SACRTF will build upon the existing initiatives, forums, and coordination mechanisms in the region to enhance linkages between agencies and governments for the effective implementation of laws and regulations relating to the management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems.

The SACRTF will formulate an action plan within existing management frameworks to improve the cooperative management of critical marine habitats. The inclusion of key coral reef stakeholders in the SACRTF will facilitate the exchange of site-based realities to governments, donor organisations, and other relevant forums alike, and will provide environmental information to support policy makers and politicians on a national and regional level, in the development or review of policy. The SACRTF will undertake focused action to assist countries in transboundary matters and in the attainment of commitments to Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).

SACRTF Mission Statement

To actively participate in, and support, the effective implementation of existing national regulations, action plans and strategies for the management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and to promote the development of strategic linkages for enhanced regional cooperation, and the establishment of an effective, networked system of marine and coastal protected areas in the South Asia region.

Role of the SACRTF

- Actively participate and support the formulation and implementation of a regional action strategy, within existing frameworks, to improve cooperative management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems;
- Assist in the joint management of transboundary coral reef resources (e.g. GOM large marine ecosystem) through the development of strategic national (private sector, industry NGO), and regional agency linkages;
- Assist in the development of science based plans to manage coral reefs, which includes the identification and implementation of MCPAs, and the active advancement of concepts and discussions relating to networks of MCPAs and their potential benefits to South Asia;
- Identify existing forums, committees and networks engaged in coral reef management action for the development of strategic partnerships, and in order to commence work from present levels of implementation;
- Actively participate and support policy makers and decision makers to develop and implement national coral reef action plans or strategies, through the identification of needs, and capacity gaps in the implementation of existing laws and regulations;
- Encourage the establishment of national Coral Reef Task Forces (CRTF), with multi-sector representation, to support the development of local capacity in research, management and government, coordinate communication at the national level, and serve as a platform to share information with regional initiatives;
- Provide scientific input and strategic leadership to inform and influence policies, encouraging appropriate planning, the exchange of best practices, and demonstrating effective models within the region and across national boundaries;
- Identify funding and other support needed for management, equipment, and capacity building training through national, regional and global contacts, and assist, through the provision of technical advice, in fundraising for coral reefs activities and projects that will benefit the region and individual countries;

- Monitor progress of coral reef management actions, to facilitate reporting to governments of SA countries, donors, and other relevant forums. Garner ministerial and governmental support to address issues that arise with the implementation of existing management plans and future management needs;
- Actively participate in relevant international fora to raise the profile of the South Asia region within the international community;
- Facilitate communication and the dissemination of information for scientific purposes, and support regional and national public awareness raising campaigns to highlight the plight of coral reefs;
- Actively support community and gender balance activities and partnerships for sustainable and equitable use of coral resources for increased livelihood security.
- Actively support, and advance, where appropriate, the deliverables of the South Asia MCPA Project, funded by the European Union, under which the SACRT was established.

Plan for Implementation

The SACRTF will build on existing national and regional efforts and [will focus on a limited number of priority areas each year in order to maximise the impacts]. Actions under the following broad headings will be refined according to feedback from CRTFs, and used to build out the annual SACRTF work plan.

Priority Actions

Coordination

1. Lead and facilitate the development of strong multilateral linkages for all aspects of coral reef management within and between countries by engaging strategic stakeholders in SACRTF activities, and providing a focal representation for coral reef management.
2. Work alongside key national stakeholders to establish national Coral Reef Task Forces (CRTF), with multi-sector representation, to support the development of local capacity in research, management and government, coordinate communication at the national level, and serve as a platform to share information with regional initiatives.
3. Examine capacity needs, evaluate and review existing mechanisms for coral reef conservation and management, and where appropriate encourage each country to design national action plans or equivalent strategies, under the umbrella of the regional action strategy.
4. Prepare a regional coral reef action strategy, incorporating the key findings on the development and implementation of a networked system of MCPAs across the South Asia region, and identify supporting frameworks for effective implementation.
5. Initiate discussions regarding the development of a coordinated regional mandate or mechanism to more effectively respond to natural and man made disasters.
6. Designate institutions as a focal point for coral reefs to increase coordination potential.

Communication

1. Improve, and better coordinate reporting mechanisms nationally and within the region on all coral reef work with the aid of the South Asia MCPA Project website and other media.
2. Encourage, and support the development of capacity building and training opportunities, materials, and manuals for groups involved in coral reef programmes through skills transfer and exchange programmes.
3. Identify strategic partnerships and linkages at the regional and international level (e.g. ICRI), and review recommendations and other relevant information from regional and international initiatives, in order to develop responsive and informed action plans.
4. Increase awareness of environmental conservation and management among decision and policy makers through lobbying and exposure visits.

Research and Monitoring

1. Identify the strengths in each country in all aspects of research and monitoring related to coral reefs. Develop a mechanism to ensure knowledge and training is shared and exchanged among the participating countries in accordance with needs.

2. Encourage each country to effectively establish national monitoring programmes for coral reefs and associated ecosystems, and recommend better coordination within and between countries in the region in the design and implementation of monitoring programmes.

3. Promote both biophysical and socio economic assessment/monitoring and more effective coordination with regional and international monitoring programmes.

Policy

1. Undertake a review of existing policy related to coral reef management and conservation in the region, in collaboration with the SACRTF Patron, and present the findings to authorities to influence the review of existing legislation and policy change at the national level as appropriate.

2. Elevate the South Asia experience to the international level by engagement in ICRI. The SACRTF will select a representative to participate in ICRI General Meetings.

3. Raise awareness of the need for political engagement in coral reef management through high-level political segment meetings. The SACRTF will present specific agenda items at each SACEP Governing Council meeting to raise awareness of needs, and develop political will in support the SACRTF.

Fundraising

1. Raise the profile of coral reefs issues, and successful initiatives in the region in order to garner support from donor community and attract funds.

2. Identify and package existing or new activities to create a regional effort in support of the International Year of the Reef 2008, and other mass awareness raising campaigns (e.g. Earth Day, World Environment Day).

3. Develop a budget projection for the annual maintenance of the SACRTF to present to country governments, to advance the identification of a sustainable structure and funding mechanism to ensure the continuation of the SACRTF.

4. Map a meeting calendar of coral reef forums, venues and meetings, against the movements of SACRTF representatives to maximise representation of the SACRTF regionally and internationally, and facilitate linked meetings of the SACRTF where the quorum of representatives will be reached.

5. Review existing national budget allocations for coral reef conservation and management to identify potential financial support for the SACRTF.

Structure of the SACRTF

The SACRTF will be formed of a representative group of policy makers, regional experts and stakeholders. Through a consultative process, participating country governments and key regional stakeholders were requested to nominate a representative to participate in the SACRTF.

Composition

1. Government Representative(s) from each country* (12)
2. Coral Reef Ecosystem Expert, one from each country* (5)
3. CRTF Representative, one from each country** (5)
4. [International NGO or Agency (e.g. UNEP)]
5. Member Secretary (1)
6. Patron (1)

To compensate for unforeseen changes in administration, representatives may, at any time, designate or nominate an appropriate substitute to act on their behalf, ensuring that an appropriate hand over is conducted with the incoming representative, and that other SACRTF representatives are informed in advance. To insulate the SACRTF from changes in administration, government representation should be institutionalised so that responsibilities become a function of the post and not an individual.

Organisation

1. There will be two government representatives from each country:

- Secretary/nominee of the concerned ministry
- One nominated government representative

A Chairperson will be selected, by consensus of the SACRTF, from among the country government representatives, who will serve on a rotational basis. The Chairperson will serve for a period of one year. A full TOR will be developed to reflect the suggested role.

2. One coral reef ecosystem expert, by name, will be nominated by each country government to participate in the regional meetings and discussions of the SACRTF. The term will be a maximum of two-years. No consecutive nominations of the same representative can be made.

3. One representative will be nominated by each CRTF to participate in the regional meetings and discussions of the SACRTF. The terms and conditions of representation will be decided at the country level. A temporary representative from the selected MCPA project site in each country may participate in the SACRTF while the CRTF is established.

5. The Director General, SACEP will serve as the Member Secretary to provide continuity and administrative support to the SACRTF. A full TOR will be developed to reflect the suggested role.

6. Justice Weeramantry will act as the patron of the SACRTF.

Special Provisions

The SACRTF can invite national and international experts as technical advisors to the SACRTF on a case-by-case basis. The SACRTF may also invite other stakeholders of strategic importance to participate in regional meetings.

Where appropriate, and with SACRTF general agreement, special committees may be formed to address critical, emerging issues which may be region wide (e.g. social/livelihoods, coral bleaching, natural disasters, etc.), or location specific (e.g. oil spills, point source pollution, coastal development, etc.).

Selection of SACRTF Representatives

SACRTF representatives have, or will be, nominated by governments and key regional stakeholders. Representatives should have adequate skills to provide policy, management, capacity training, or scientific advice related to marine and coastal ecosystems. Representatives should demonstrate enthusiasm for the SACRTF and its role, and must be able to participate in accordance with the identified TOR, operating procedures and SACRTF work plan. SACRTF representatives will be allocated tasks in light of their existing work commitments and their area of expertise. While a limited budget is available to support the initial establishment process of the SACRTF, defining a sustainable model is critical, as will be the in-kind support of participating institutions and individuals while the model is defined.

Administration of the SACRTF

Meetings

1. Representatives of the SACRTF will meet at least once annually. A minimum quorum of 50% of representatives should be present for each meeting.
2. Any SACRTF representative, combination of representatives, or CRTF Focal Point representative may submit agenda items, such as funding proposals or information documents, for consideration and discussion by the SACRTF representatives at meetings. Agenda items must be submitted to the Member Secretary at least 30 days prior to formal SACRTF meetings, for compilation and distribution.
3. Meetings of the SACRTF shall be conducted in each participating country on a rotational basis in consultation with SACEP.
4. The decisions of the SACRTF shall be through a consensus-based process.

Funding

Funds to support the initial establishment of the SACRTF have been generously provided by the European Union. The development of a sustainable financing strategy, by the SACRTF, will be critical to ensure the continuation of the SACRTF, and the expansion of the network to incorporate CRTFs in each participating country. SACEP currently administer the budget of the SACRTF, and will provide support in the organisation and coordination of meetings, reporting to the European Union, through UNEP and ICRAN, on progress of the SACRTF, and the dissemination of outputs.

Terms of Reference

- Actively participate and support policy makers and decision makers to develop and implement national coral reef action plans or strategies, through the identification of needs, and capacity gaps in the implementation of existing laws and regulations;
- Actively participate and support the formulation and implementation of a regional plans, within existing frameworks, to improve cooperative management of coral reefs and associated ecosystems;
- Identify regional coral reef resource use and management needs that have an impact regionally, building on the inputs of national CRTFs, and develop collaborative management strategies to control them for the sustainable use of resources;
- Assist in the joint management of transboundary coral reef resources (e.g. GOM large marine ecosystem) through the development of strategic national (private sector, industry NGO), and regional agency linkages;
- Provide scientific input and strategic leadership to inform and influence policies, encouraging appropriate planning, the exchange of best practices, and demonstrating effective models within the region and across national boundaries;
- Identify funding and other support needed for management, equipment, and capacity building training through national, regional and global contacts, and assist, through the provision of technical advice, in fundraising for coral reefs activities and projects that will benefit the region and individual countries;
- Monitor progress of coral reef management actions, to facilitate reporting to governments of South Asian countries, donors, and other relevant forums. Garner ministerial and governmental support to address issues that arise with the implementation of existing management plans and future management needs.
- Actively participate in relevant regional and international fora to raise the profile of the South Asia region within the international community, and to highlight the achievements of the SACRTF.
- Facilitate communication and the dissemination of information for scientific purposes, and support local, regional and international public awareness raising campaigns to highlight the plight of coral reefs;
- Actively support community based and gender balance activities and partnerships for sustainable and equitable use of coral resources for increased livelihood security;
- Assist in the construction of an identity and presence of the SACRTF in the region;
- Support representatives of CRTFs in the elaboration and implementation of CRTF structure and participation;
- Work alongside SACRTF and CRTF representatives and principal stakeholders to define and implement an annual work plan, mindful of commitments of representatives, the goals of the EU project under which the SACRTF has been established, the available budget, and wider regional needs;
- Advance the work plan of the SACRTF through collaborative efforts in line with the identified priority actions;
- Participate in meetings of SACRTF; and
- Provide regular reports to donors and project partners, through the Member Secretary, compiling reports and feedback from CRTFs.

The Chairperson will perform the following supporting roles:

- Foster relationships and strategic partnerships to advance the work programme and financial sustainability of the SACRTF;
- Provide leadership to the SACRTF representatives, and assist in providing appropriate input into the formulation of frameworks, strategies and work plans;
- Assist in the identification of focal areas of strategic importance for the SACRTF, in collaboration with CRTFs, and in line with regional and international agreements and strategies;
- Monitor the implementation and impact of the SACRTF and CRTF work plans, and communicate with representatives to ensure the timely delivery of planned actions;
- Represent the SACRTF at appropriate functions and meetings, and work alongside representatives and the Member Secretary to promote the SACRTF at the regional and international level; and
- Attend and chair SACRTF meetings.

The Member Secretary will perform the following supporting roles:

- Convene and coordinate each regional meeting of the SACRTF, in consultation with SACRTF representatives and host country;
- Act as a focal point for SACRTF representatives and administer the budget, facilitating travel arrangements, and regional/international meeting participation;
- Administer and coordinate the SACRTF MCPA Manager Exchange Programme in collaboration with key SACRTF representatives;
- Assist in the collation of minutes, and the dissemination and coordination of the outcomes of the SACRTF meetings, and activities;
- Work alongside regional governments and SACRTF representatives to promote the SACRTF at the regional and international level, and to fundraise for the sustainable continuation of the SACRTF;
- Report to the SACRTF on a quarterly basis, to provide programmatic and financial updates to representatives; and
- Feed progress reports to partners and donors as appropriate.
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In line with the role of the SACRTF described above, representatives of the SACRTF will be required to:

- Assist in the development and presence of the SACRTF in the region;
- Assist in establishing a legitimacy and sustainable financing structure to support the continuation of the SACRTF;
- Work alongside other SACRTF and CRTF representatives and principal stakeholders to define and implement an annual work plan, in line with the TOR, taking into account the commitments of representatives, the goals of the EU project under which the SACRTF has been established, the available budget, and wider regional needs;
- Identify and establish strategic linkages with international (E.g. ICRI) and regional (E.g. SAARC/SAS) processes related to coral reef ecosystem management;
- Support representatives of national CRTFs in the elaboration and implementation of CRTF structure and participation;
- Actively participate in meetings of SACRTF, and the implementation of identified actions;
- Represent the SACRTF at appropriate functions and meetings, and work alongside representatives and the Member Secretary to promote the SACRTF at the regional and international level
- Monitor the progress and impact of the SACRTF against the defined work plan, and feed information to relevant partners and donors, through the Member Secretary; and

- Facilitate linkages and dialogue between sectors, institutions, organisations and communities to maximise synergies at all levels of work on coral reefs.

Annex 2:

National CRTF Constitution

Building on the constitution of the SACRTF, a simple CRTF constitution has been developed for consideration by national agencies, organisations and stakeholders, in support of the establishment of a CRTF.

CRTF – National Structure

Each participating country will establish a national Coral Reef Task Force (CRTF). Recognising that economies of scale exist between countries of the South Asia region, each country will be encouraged to define the structure and operation of their CRTF based on identified national needs, and the available capacity. It is recognised that the constitution may vary between countries. To facilitate continuity and the inclusion of critical stakeholders, it is encouraged that each CRTF consider the inclusion of representatives from the following groups:

1. CRTF Focal Point Representatives
2. National Marine and Coastal Experts
3. Government Organisations
4. Scientific Community
5. Non-Governmental Organisations
6. Resource Managers
7. Private Sector

Ideally, representation will be secured from each of the stakeholder groups listed. Some countries may wish to seek greater representation in one or more stakeholder group area depending on the local situation. Each CRTF should seek to include those people actively involved in coral reef and associated ecosystem management and conservation activities.

A CRTF Focal point should be appointed in each country, who will liaise with, and participate in, SACRTF meetings and discussions feeding national priorities and issues to the regional level. The CRTF focal point nomination will rotate every two years, following consultation and nomination by other CRTF representatives. Terms and conditions of representation are to be determined at the national level.

Role of CRTF

In support of the SACRTF, each CRTF will:

- Identify priority management actions for coral reefs and associated ecosystems as listed in existing national and local management plans, and management frameworks etc.;
- Identify existing forums, committees and networks engaged in coral reef management action for the development of strategic partnerships, and in order to commence work from present levels of implementation;
- Identify shortcomings, gaps and possible causes for the lack of implementation of recommendations and stated action in national and local management plans;
- Investigate, as a priority, the shortcomings, gaps, and management challenges of participating M CPA sites selected through the EU funded project, and prioritise the issues to be addressed;
- Identify possible mechanisms or solutions for ground level action to overcome the shortcomings identified, that may be fed into regional SACRTF processes, by CRTF Focal Point;
- Facilitate implementation of the recommended actions through locally relevant organisations and government departments; and
- Identify marine and coastal resource management success stories and devise methods for capitalising on these to leverage and build political and financial support.

Role of CRTF Representatives

- Assist in the development and presence of the CRTF in the country;
- Monitor progress of coral reef management actions, to facilitate reporting to the local government, the SACRTF, donors, and other relevant forums. Garner ministerial and governmental support to address issues that arise with the implementation of existing management plans and future management needs;
- Actively participate in relevant local, national, and regional fora to raise the profile of local issues region within the marine science community;
- Facilitate communication and the dissemination of information for scientific and public awareness purposes; and
- Facilitate linkages and dialogue between sectors, institutions, organisations and communities to maximise synergies at all levels of work on coral reefs

The selection and identification of CRTF representatives will be determined at the national level, in accordance with the local situation and needs.