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Environment ministers agree to create Guinea Current Commission

In a landmark decision designed to safeguard their Large Marine Ecosystem, environment ministers from 16 West and Central African countries agreed on 2 July to create the Guinea Current Commission and unanimously accepted Ghana's offer to host the new regional body.

This decision by the Committee of GCLME Ministers, who met in the Ghanaian capital, Accra, is designed to streamline and bolster the management of the region's Large Marine Ecosystem, an endangered body of water and 5,560 kilometres of coastline stretching from Guinea-Bissau to Angola.



Photo: Olu Sarr/IGCC GCLME

"The Committee, for the second time, institutionalises the ad hoc LME project and paves the way for a sustainable institution within a timeframe of five years," Dr Stephen Maxwell Donkor, the Executive Secretary of the [Interim Guinea Current Commission](#), said at the end of the meeting.

Prior to the creation of a permanent body, the Interim Commission had been overseeing the GEF funded 16-nation Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) project. The transition from an interim to a full commission marked the attainment of the goal, expressed by the ministers in the [Abuja Declaration of 2006](#).

In the [Osu Declaration](#), adopted at the end of their daylong meeting in Accra 2 July, the ministers also mandated the Executive Secretariat to consult further with Member States and partners on specific articles "to ensure clarity" on the financial commitments to the new Commission. These consultations will be pursued with the support of a designated working group comprising Angola, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon, Nigeria, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations

Environmental Programme Under the declaration, the Executive Secretary is also mandated to consult the Abidjan Convention and the Gulf of Guinea Commission in Angola and with regional and subregional fisheries bodies, to define "roles and responsibilities, linkages and interfaces and to document these in written agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding, as appropriate".

Consultations are to end by November 2010 and final documents should be completed for confirmation, preferably during the 9th Convention of Parties of the Abidjan Convention.

This second ministerial meeting was preceded by a two-day meeting of the IGCC's 7th Steering Committee.

Mid-term review of National Action Plans ends; countries make significant progress

Countries participating in the GCLME project have made significant progress in developing their National Action Plans, the consultant guiding the process said.

"Nigeria, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire have made impressive progress, whose draft plans served as case studies and examples for the other countries," Andrew Cooke, the international consultant recruited to guide and support the process for the development of National Action Plans, said on 13th July at the end of the two-day workshop in Accra.



Photo: Yao Modenou/IGCC GCLME

Andrew Cooke, consultant for the National Action Plans.

On average, he said, the 16 countries in the GCLME project had reached half-way in the preparation of their National Action Plans, which include proposed policy and legal reforms, investment needed and economic instruments.



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Some countries had gone “a long way” in identifying the strategic investments needed to tackle environmental problems, he added, but “they still have considerable work to do in developing these into bankable projects”.

The National Action Plans are frameworks for the sustainable use and management of coastal and marine environment resources at country-level. They are integral elements of the Strategic Action Programme for the GCLME. Thus the implementation of the NAPs will catalyze the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme, which is the overarching regional political framework for the sustainable management and protection of the marine environment in the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem area against the problems identified in a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis.

Given the crucial importance of the National Action Plans for the ecosystem-wide implementation of the Strategic Action Programme, the Interim Guinea Current Commission will continue to support the National Action Plan development process through technical assistance. Furthermore, an IGCC/GCLME partners' conference due in Cameroon will link national priorities to donor funding interests, to enhance the chances of attracting the co-financing required by the countries for the implementation of the priority projects identified in their National Action Plans.



Photo: Yao Modenou/IGCC GCLME

Participants at the mid-term review of National Action Plans

All countries represented at the workshop identified a transboundary need for marine protected areas, sustainable mangrove management, and better pollution control and prevention.

Cameroon's NAP coordinator, Jean Folack, said the workshop had been “very important”, because at the national level the NAP would be the concrete translation of the Strategic Action Programme to achieve all goals of the GCLME project.

The workshop provided a valuable opportunity for delegates to exchange experiences and ideas, useful for completing their planning processes. In all, 14 of the 16 GCLME project countries were represented at the workshop.

Value of social and environmental services provided by healthy ecosystems discussed

Experts from the Guinea current countries of West and Central Africa met for two-days beginning 14 July to discuss harmonized methods of measuring the economic value of a healthy marine and coastal ecosystem running from Guinea-Bissau to Angola.

“The aim is to give a first estimation of the overall [economic] value [use and non-use value] of the GCLME ecosystem in order to form the basis for decision-making regarding protection and further utilization of the ecosystem,” said Eduard Interwies, the

international socio-economic consultant hired for this module by the IGCC, at the Accra workshop in Ghana.

Environmentalists say that a well-protected, managed and sustained ecosystem has two main advantages: first, it can increase the welfare of the local communities by increasing fish yields, tourism income and maintaining a continuous stream of timber and non-timber products from mangrove forests.

Second, it can also improve a country's overall economic performance by providing environmental services like the reduction of coastal erosion and carbon sequestration capacity.



Photo: Yao Modenou/IGCC GCLME

To achieve this goal Interwies is closely cooperating with national socio-economic experts appointed by the GCLME countries.

The GCLME project was, at this workshop, helping countries to better assess the economic valuation of resources in the GCLME area. This is in line with the [Global Environment Facility](#)-funded effort to “combat the living resources depletion and coastal area degradation in the Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem”. The main focus of combating resources depletion and coastal degradation centres on the priority problems GCLME countries have identified in a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis as having led to unsustainable fisheries, the unsustainable use of other marine resources, as well as the degradation of the marine and coastal environment by human activity.

Scientists undergo fish stomach content analysis training

Fishery scientists from eight of the 16 Guinea current countries held a five-day workshop in Luanda, Angola, that began 20 August. This training workshop organized by the IGCC in cooperation with the National Fisheries Institute of Angola, the designate Regional Activity Centre for Fisheries, focussed on the analysis of the stomach contents of different species taken in a recent fishery trawl survey off Gabonese and the Republic of Congo's waters.

The analyses will provide information for a better understanding of the trophic interaction within the ecosystem, with a special reference on the feeding behaviour of the fish species. Furthermore the workshop will provide inputs for a follow-up activity on Ecosystem Modelling using *ecosim* - a time dynamic simulation module for policy exploration. Better knowledge on the dynamics of fish stocks is required to develop sustainable fisheries management plans. The absence of agreed, implemented, monitored and enforced management plans constitutes one of the major causes of overexploitation of the fishery resources worldwide. Therefore management and conservation of the marine resources aims at attaining sustainability of these resources; ensuring that oceans are

left clean for posterity; and ensuring that ecosystems are seen as part of life which are affected by the environment, marine organisms (predators and preys) and human activity.



Photo: Socrates/IGCC GCLME

The Guinea current was once rich in demersal and pelagic fish populations. However, poor management and years of unregulated and uncontrolled exploitation of marine resources has resulted in over-fishing, as well as destruction of habitats and ecosystems.

The workshop was held at the GCLME project's Fisheries Regional Activity Centre in the Angolan capital, Luanda. Training on stomach content analysis will enable local and regional scientists to apply appropriate methodologies in their countries. The results of the analysis will be used for stock assessment of the region's fishery resources through the assessment of food intake at the various trophic levels.

The workshop was the third hosted by the GCLME project since its inception in 2005. This workshop was an aspect of the Interim Guinea Current Commission's effort to recover fish stocks and enhance food security for the region's 300 million people, 40 per cent of whom live in coastal areas.



Photo: socrates/IGCC GCLME

Scientists come from Angola, Congo, Gabon, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Sao Tome and Principe, and Republic of Congo

Workshop co-organized with the International Maritime Organization held on prevention of marine pollution

Participants at a regional workshop on the main international convention governing the prevention of maritime pollution by ships

have called for further training on the various aspects of the legislation because, they said, it would be "extremely useful" at the regional and national levels.

The appeal came at the end of their workshop held 24-27 August in Kirikiri, Lagos, Nigeria's leading port city and commercial hub.

Conducted at the Regional Maritime Resource Centre, the workshop was held to familiarize mostly maritime lawyers in the Guinea current region on the provision of legislation on the MARPOL Convention. The workshop examined the ratification, implementation and enforcement of the convention.



Photo: Jacques Abe/IGCC GCLME

The convention is the main international body of law designed to prevent or minimize pollution of the marine environment by ships from operational and accidental oil, chemical, sewage and garbage spills. The convention was adopted at the [International Maritime Organization](#) and is a combination of two treaties adopted in 1973 and 1978 and updated by amendments through the years. It currently includes [six technical Annexes](#).

The workshop was arranged to familiarize participants and raise regional awareness to the provisions of the current legislation. The workshop also aimed at ensuring that all parties are aware of their legal rights and obligations. At the workshop, detailed information was provided on parts of the convention that require greater knowledge. The workshop was also intended to develop a regional cooperation framework in cases of major marine pollution incidents within the GCLME region. This workshop formed an integral part of collaboration between the GCLME Project and the International Maritime Organization to address shipping-related sources of pollution in the region.

All 30 workshop participants were drawn from Maritime organizations and related institutions from the 16 GCLME member countries and non-GCLME countries such as Gambia, Mauritania, Namibia, Senegal and South Africa. Private sector representatives involved in the handling of bulk chemical products were among the 30 participants.

Consultative meeting suggests coastal management plans be integrated into NAPs

A consultative meeting between the Cameroonian Inter-Ministerial Committee on the environment and the Interim Guinea Current Commission has recommended the merging of coastal management activities with the National Action Plans, which are presently being developed and reviewed, to safeguard the nation's marine ecosystems.

This meeting took place on 24 September in Yaounde, the nation's capital; on behalf of the IGCC the Guinea Current Commission Executive Secretary, Dr. Stephen Maxwell Donkor, and Ambassador Walther Lichem, a consultant to the Guinea Current Commission on international legal and institutional matters attended.

Other recommendations made were that Ambassador Lichem is to seek advice from the Lake Chad Basin Commission on the proposed changes to the body's Arbitration Committee. The meeting also suggested that the role of each person on the Guinea Current Commission's management board be clearly defined in the organization's flow chart.

The consultation was held in line with the [Osu Declaration](#) of 2 July by the Committee of Environment Ministers of the Guinea Current countries. The main points at the meeting included a briefing on the GCLME project, the relationship between the Guinea Current Commission and the Abidjan Convention; the National Action Plan and coastal management zones of Cameroon; the Guinea Current Commission partner's conference; and the treaty creating the commission.



Members of the consultative meeting in Yaoundé, the Cameroonian capital. Ambassador Lichem second from left; Dr. Stephen Maxwell Donkor fifth from left.

Dr. Donkor gave a historical outlook from the Gulf of Guinea Project to the present-day decision to establish the Guinea Current Commission, whose principle aim is to assist Guinea Current countries to protect and sustainably manage their marine resources and to halt degradation of coastal habitats. On the relationship between the Guinea Current Commission and the Abidjan Convention, Dr Donkor explained the complementary nature of these two bodies and said that the Commission abided by the Convention's norms and by those of other international instruments concerning the environment and development such as the MDGs and the WSSD

Dr Donkor called on the ministries collaborating with the GCLME project to validate the National Action Plan as soon as possible. Validation of the National Action Plans is vital if each country in the Guinea current region is to make a case for external financial support of their priority projects. A partners' conference to mobilize co-financing for the countries efforts is scheduled to take place in Cameroon in February 2011.

Ambassador Lichen briefed the meeting on the Treaty creating the Guinea Current Commission. In this regard, he summarized the horizontal nature of the Commission, its principal organs, the rotational nature of its presidency, the foreseen fishery "platform", and the contribution expected from each member country.

Fisheries commissions in cooperation talks

Senior officials from two fisheries bodies in West and Central Africa arrived in Accra 20 August for talks on cooperation between their institutions and the IGCC.

The visiting officials were the permanent secretary of the six-nation [Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission](#) in Dakar, Senegal, Cire Kane, and the secretary of the Fisheries Committee for West and Central Africa, Seraphin Nadje.

In a meeting with IGCC Executive Secretary Dr. Stephen Donkor and his senior staff, Kane called for the joint execution of common activities such as the development and implementation of fisheries management plans. All regional fisheries committees - such as the [Regional Fish Committee for the Gulf of Guinea](#), or COREP; and the [Fisheries Committee for West-Central Gulf of Guinea](#) - have planned this activity. Their focus is on the ecosystem approach of fisheries management.

Another issue of mutual concern to these regional bodies is the transboundary nature of fisheries resources, which they discussed. Noting the transboundary nature of the environmental and resource management issues, 16 ministers of the environment from West and Central Africa met in 2006 in Abuja, Nigeria, and agreed on measures to tend to these concerns.

Countries in the Guinea current region are battling deteriorating coastal and marine environments. The problems have been caused by severe depletion of shared resources, resulting in the loss of biodiversity. They are also faced with increasing pollution from land and sea-based activities, as well as the destruction of sensitive habitats.

The Large Marine Ecosystem approach is being employed by the 16 nations of the Guinea Current region, - under the coordination of the IGCC - to create an ecosystem-wide assessment and management framework for the sustainable use of living and non-living resources.

Documentary made on effects of climate change in three West African countries

A film crew hired by the African Development Forum Secretariat of the UNECA arrived in Accra 5 September to begin shooting a documentary film on the effects of climate change in selected African countries.



Photo: Olu Saar/IGCC GCLME

The five-member film crew began its three-nation West African shooting in Ghana, investigating the effects of climate change on eastern coastal communities and on the presence of algae bloom in the west of the country. Rising sea levels, resulting from global warming, have washed away hundreds of metres of land in the Ghana's Keta area.



Photo: Carl Fiati/EPA Ghana.

The film crew left Ghana 10 September for Nigeria, the second leg of its tour, where it will investigate logging and its effects on communities. From Nigeria the film crew went to Chad where it documented the drying up of Lake Chad, a shallow lake, and the effects of this on the millions of people Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria which depend on Lake Chad as a source of water and livelihood.

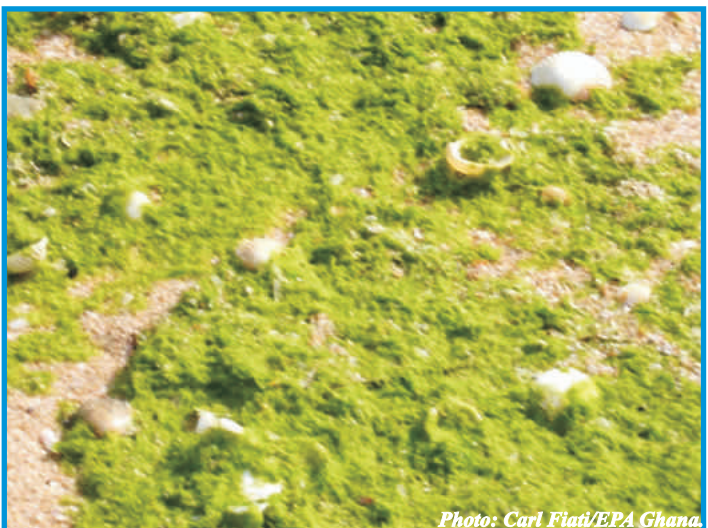


Photo: Carl Fiati/EPA Ghana.

The documentary will be screened in the upcoming African Development Forum meeting in Addis Ababa, home of the Economic Commission for Africa.



Photo: Carl Fiati/EPA Ghana.

Interns complete attachment at RCU

Six interns received their certificates of appreciation 30 August, marking the end of their internship with the Regional Coordination Unit of the Interim Guinea Current Commission/Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem project.



Photo: Yao Modenou/IGCC GCLME

The interns, with diverse university academic backgrounds, were attached to the RCU's administration, biodiversity, communications and fisheries units. They represent the first batch of interns to support the RCU while gaining hands on practical experience in working in an international environment.

Upcoming Events

19-21 Oct – Accra, Ghana – Waste Management Roundtable.

24-26 Oct – Accra, Ghana – GCLME Productivity workshop

November – Cameroon – Joint regional workshop on Integrated Coastal Area Management and [Integrated Water Resources Management Organization](#)

December – Accra, Ghana – 2nd Regional Workshop on Ecosystem-based Fisheries Management Using ECOPATH with ECOSIM (EwE) software.

February 2011 – Cameroon – GCLME Partners Conference

March 2011 – GCLME Eight Steering Committee Meeting