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November 1st 2011

CERMES

Policy Perspectives

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The emerging ocean governance regime in the Wider Caribbean Region

Summary statement

Ocean governance is essential in the Wider Caribbean Region due to high dependence on marine ecosystem goods and services that support Caribbean economies, societies, cultures, recreation and spirituality.

Countries have committed to ocean governance through agreements such as UNCLOS, Agenda 21 and CBD.

Regional ocean governance is difficult in the Wider Caribbean Region because it is the most geopolitically complex in the world with many marine dependent and vulnerable SIDS.

Countries must collaborate as these ecosystems and their resources are typically transboundary.

Regional ocean governance arrangements have been emerging and are also diverse; but geographically fragmented leaving gaps, areas of low cooperation and duplication of effort.

The emerging regional ocean governance network regime is consistent with new governance thinking that sees advantages in a network consisting of a diversity of organisations. This is a fruitful direction for the region to pursue; but through planning and coordination rather than it just happening.

An effective networked ocean governance system requires assessment of institutional gaps and overlaps among the organisations involved and their interactions with each and with WCR countries. The need for coordination and harmonisation of ocean governance policy at the level of the entire region is urgent.

The Caribbean Sea Commission can provide regional ocean governance policy harmonisation and coordination. All the other regional organisations involved have accepted the CSC's potential to add value to their work by serving as a regional political forum. The General Assemblies of the UN and OAS have also endorsed the CSC.

Establishing the Secretariat of the Caribbean Sea Commission to harmonise and coordinate regional ocean governance policy is a critical next step.

Integrated regional ocean policy can be formulated and ecosystem-based management pursued by strengthening networked regional governance arrangements to address the sustainable development challenges that the region faces.
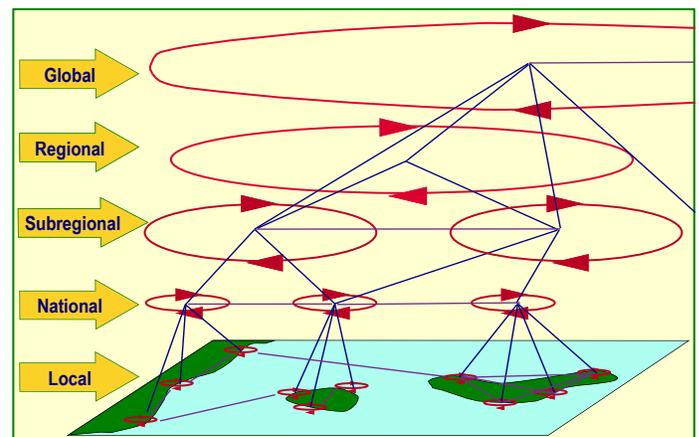
An exciting and innovative new direction for ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean Region is at hand. Accepting and adopting an ocean governance network regime for the Wider Caribbean is a significant step in this direction.

Explanation of Statement

Why ocean governance is essential in the Wider Caribbean

Ocean governance is essential in the Wider Caribbean Region because the region is highly dependent on marine ecosystems for critical goods and services that support fisheries and tourism, and these are threatened.

The diverse, mainly small-scale, fisheries in the region, harvest finfish, lobster, conch, shrimps and many other types of resources from the three major fishery ecosystems: coral reef, pelagic and continental shelf. Coral reef ecosystems are the basis for much of the region's tourism industry as they provide beach sand, protect beaches and offer recreation opportunities such as snorkeling and SCUBA diving[1, 2].

The sea is also an integral part of the recreation, culture and spirituality of Caribbean peoples. The value of these services is very high.

Climate change impacts will be prominent in ocean and coastal areas. In the WCR, healthy coastal and marine systems will be important for climate change adaptation.

Marine ecosystems in the Wider Caribbean are being impacted by many marine and land-based activities[2]. Over-fishing, pollution and coastal habitat destruction are prominent impacts; each with a diversity of facets. These also have transboundary aspects that require collaboration among countries.

Marine ecosystems and their resources in the WCR are usually transboundary[2]. This means that countries are obligated to collaborate to ensure their sustainability. The complexity of ocean management and the need for integration also demand regional collaboration as we move towards ecosystem based management[3] and other WSSD targets. WCR countries have committed to collaboration in ocean governance since UNCED through Agenda 21, the CBD, the SIDS BPOA and many other multilateral agreements.

Why ocean governance is difficult in the Wider Caribbean

Regional ocean governance is difficult in the WCR because it is one of the most geopolitically complex regions in the world, in terms of diversity of size, development, culture and capacity[4]. Small Island Developing States (SIDS) - there are 18 in the WCR - are particularly marine dependent and vulnerable.

The diversity in the WCR makes it more difficult to find common ground at the level of the entire region than in more homogeneous regions. Language is one of several sources of diversity making it difficult to work together.

What has been emerging in regional ocean governance?

Regional ocean governance arrangements have been emerging over the past decades and are themselves diverse. The figure on the next page illustrates the diversity and ongoing establishment of organisations whose roles and activities must be considered. Important regional agreements are also shown in the figure.

There are over 30 different regional and subregional organisations with some level of engagement in governance of the ocean and its resources in the region. They include UN organisations and regional intergovernmental organisations. They may be oriented towards fisheries, pollution, biodiversity, tourism, shipping, etc. They cover most key areas of ocean governance but are geographically fragmented and may not interact much with each other leaving gaps, areas of low cooperation and duplication of effort. Lacking is a body to integrate and rationalize these efforts region-wide at a policy level

Can the emerging ocean governance system work?

Conventional approaches to regional ocean governance have usually been oriented towards establishing a single organisation, created by a binding treaty, with responsibility and authority to pursue transboundary ocean governance. This may not be feasible for such a complex region in which a great deal has already been invested in many organisations.

New thinking takes a broader view of possibilities for functional governance systems[5, 6, 7]. Potential, even advantages, is seen in a network involving a diversity of organisations. With a network approach, organisations (most already existing) can focus on their geographical or subject area of responsibility[5, 6]. With such an arrangement it also becomes easier to achieve subsidiarity, in which management responsibility is at the scale level closest to the issue to be managed.

In its entirety, this emerging system can be viewed as a regional ocean governance regime or complex[8]. A key component of a governance network or complex is policy coordination and harmonisation. This network regime may be a fruitful direction for the WCR. Until now it has been emerging on its own in a somewhat haphazard way. However, it will be more effective if pursued explicitly through planning and coordination[3].

What is needed to make the ocean governance system better?

A planned and coordinated regional ocean governance regime requires understanding of the emerging ocean governance system and what is needed to improve it. This includes assessment of gaps, overlaps and interactions among the organisations currently involved in regional ocean governance; and also their interactions with countries[9]. Addressing deficiencies will require coordination and policy harmonisation. In WCR fora where ocean governance is discussed, the absence of a body to perform this coordination function has often been noted by the countries and organizational partners.

The Caribbean Sea Commission (CSC) of the Association of Caribbean States has been established to pursue the goals of the Caribbean Sea Initiative – sustainable development of ocean goods and services in the WCR. The CSC appears to have the potential to be a body that could provide regional ocean governance policy harmonisation and coordination. This potential role was reviewed by partner organizations at the Expert Consultation on Operationalisation of the CSC in 2010[10]. Its potential to add value to the work of the other implementing organisations by performing this role was recognized at the consultation. It has also been endorsed by regional political fora and by the General Assemblies of the United Nations (since 1998) and Organization of American States (2011).
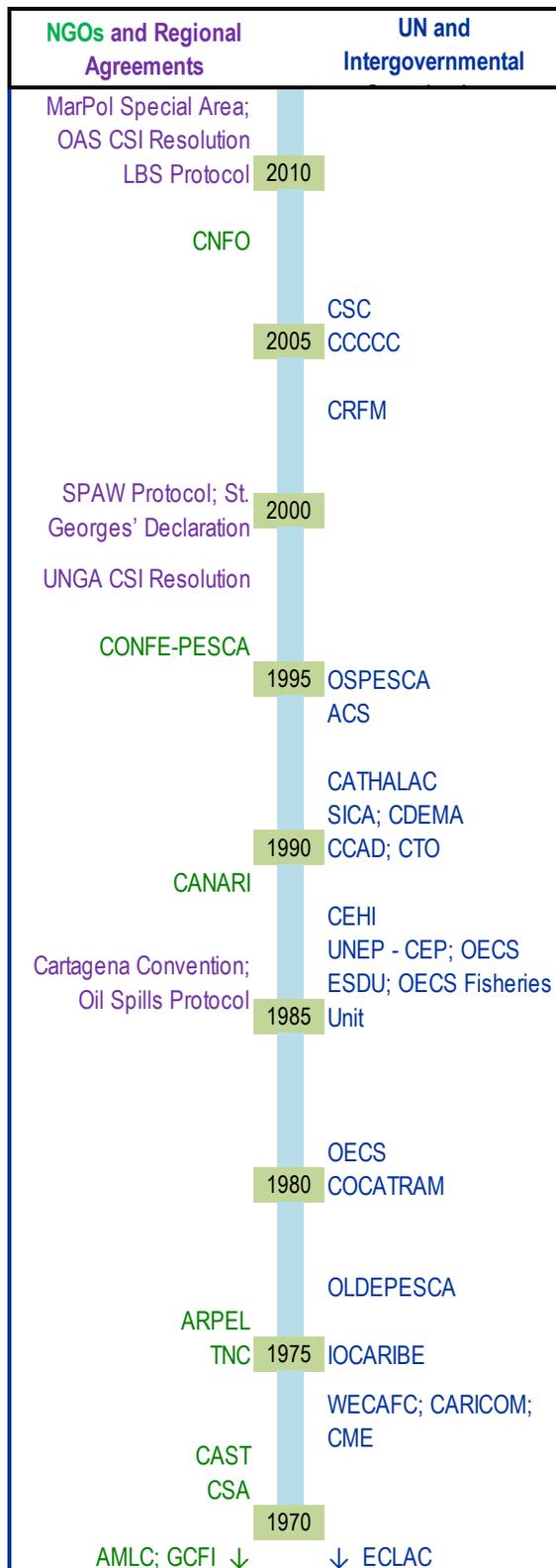
The way forward

The next steps towards promoting regional ocean governance would be to establish the Secretariat of the Caribbean Sea Commission so that it can begin to play the role that is perceived for it. The Expert Consultation[10] identified this as a coordinating and harmonizing role. The CSC would not compete with existing organisations, but seek to support and enhance their activities in their areas of expertise and competence. In order for the regime complex to be effective, attention must be paid to strengthening all its component parts and the interconnections among them.

Accepting and adopting a regime complex or network approach to regional ocean governance in the WCR is a significant step. It provides a framework within which integrated regional ocean policy can be formulated and ecosystem based management[3] can be pursued. The framework also facilitates strengthening or developing diverse regional governance arrangements that address the ocean governance challenges facing the region. This has the potential to be an exciting, innovative and effective new phase for the Wider Caribbean Region.

Timeline of establishment of regional organisations and events important to ocean governance. This rich organisational diversity is a strength of the WCR, but overarching policy coordination is lacking

NGOs and Regional Agreements		UN and Intergovernmental
MarPol Special Area; OAS CSI Resolution LBS Protocol	2010	
CNFO		
	2005	CSC CCCCC
		CRFM
SPAW Protocol; St. Georges' Declaration	2000	
UNGA CSI Resolution		
CONFE-PESCA		
	1995	OSPESCA ACS
		CATHALAC SICA; CDEMA
	1990	CCAD; CTO
CANARI		
		CEHI UNEP - CEP; OECS
Cartagena Convention; Oil Spills Protocol	1985	ESDU; OECS Fisheries Unit
	1980	OECS COCATRAM
		OLDEPESCA
ARPEL TNC	1975	IOCARIBE
		WECAFC; CARICOM; CME
CAST CSA	1970	
AMLC; GCFI ↓		↓ ECLAC

Acronyms in the figure

ACS - Association of Caribbean States; AMLC - Association of Marine Laboratories of the Caribbean; ARPEL - Regional Association of Oil, Gas and Biofuels Sector Companies in Latin America and the Caribbean; CANARI - Caribbean Natural Resource Institute; CARICOM - Caribbean Community and Common Market; CAST - Caribbean Alliance for Sustainable Tourism; CATHALAC - Water Center for the Humid Tropics of the Latin America and the Caribbean; CCAD - The Commission for Environment and Development; CCCCC - Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre; CDEMA - Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency; CEHI - Caribbean Environmental Health Institute; CMO - Caribbean Meteorological Organisation; CNFO - Caribbean Network of Fisherfolk Organisations; COCATRAM - The Central American Commission on Maritime Transport; CONFE-PESCA - Confederation of Artisanal Fishers in Central America; CRFM - Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CSA - Caribbean Shipping Association; CSC - Caribbean Sea Commission; CTO - Caribbean Tourism Organization
ECLAC - Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; GCFI - Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute
IOCARIBE - UNESCO-IOC Sub-Commission for the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions; LBS Protocol - Land Based Sources of Pollution; MarPol Special Area - International Maritime Organisation; OECS - Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States; OECS ESDU - Environment and Sustainable Development Unit; OLDEPESCA - Latin American Organization for the Development of Fisheries; OSPESCA - Organization for the Fisheries and Aquaculture Sector of the Central American Isthmus; SICA - Central American Integration System; SPAW Protocol - Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife; TNC - The Nature Conservancy – Caribbean; UNEP - CEP - United Nations Environment Programme – Caribbean Environment Programme; WECAFC – FAO Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission

References and resources

[1]Agard, J. B. R., et al. 2007. Caribbean Sea Ecosystem Assessment (CARSEA). Caribbean Marine Studies, Special Edition 2007: 85 pp. (The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment regional assessment describing the status of the Caribbean Sea)

[2]CLME 2011. Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem Regional Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis.

http://www.clme.iwlearn.org/documents/projectdocuments/fishery-ecosystems-tdas/draft-regional-transboundary-diagnostic-analysis (describes the key transboundary impacts and issues that affect the marine ecosystems of the WCR)

[3]Fanning, L., R. Mahon and P. McConney. [Eds.]. 2011. Towards Marine Ecosystem-based Management in the Wider Caribbean. Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam, 426 p. (Proceedings of a symposium that begins to develop a strategy for marine EBM with a specific focus on the conditions in the WCR)

[4]Mahon, R., L. Fanning, P. McConney and R. Pollnac. 2010. Governance characteristics of large marine ecosystems. Marine Policy 34: 919–927. (Places the WCR in the context of other Large Marine Ecosystems globally from a geopolitical and ecosystem perspective)

[5]Fanning, L., R. Mahon and P. McConney. 2009. Focusing on living marine resource governance: the Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem and Adjacent Areas Project. Coastal Management 37: 219 – 234. (describes the development of the CLME Project and the governance framework that was developed for the WCR)

[6]Fanning, L., et al. 2007. A large marine ecosystem governance framework. Marine Policy 31: 434–443.

[7]Oberthur, S. and O. S. Stokke. 2011 [eds]. Managing institutional complexity: Regime interplay and global environmental change. MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. 352 pp.

[8]Young O. R. 2010. If an Arctic Ocean treaty is not the solution, what is the alternative? Polar Record 8p. Cambridge University Press

[9]Mahon, R., P. McConney, K. Parsram, B. Simmons, M. Didier, L. Fanning, P. Goff, B. Haywood and T. Shaw. 2010. Ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean Region: Communication and coordination mechanisms by which states interact with regional organisations and projects. CERMES Technical Report No. 40. 84pp.

[10]ACS/CERMES-UWI. 2010. Report of the Expert Consultation on the Operationalisation of the Caribbean Sea Commission: building a science-policy interface for ocean governance in the Wider Caribbean. CERMES Technical Report No. 33 , 90 pp