

Meeting of the Inter-regional Forum of the European Environment Agency

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The Inter-regional Forum (IRF) was set up by the European Environment Agency (EEA) in 1995. The IRF consists of several regional conventions or action plans, which have the mandate to assess the quality of marine and coastal management. Members are the Oslo and Paris Commissions (OSPAR), the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM), the Mediterranean Action Plan (MAP), the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program (AMAP) and the Black Sea Environment Program (BSEP).

The third IRF meeting was held in Venice September 27-28, 1999. The Common Wadden Sea Secretariat participated as observer in order to establish a close contact between trilateral and European harmonizing activities on marine and coastal monitoring, data management and reporting. This allows the implementation of European monitoring standards in the trilateral work, but also gives the chance and possibility to export trilateral results and experiences, like the TMAP and the concept of the TMAP Data Units, to the European level.

The third IRF meeting focussed on assessment tools and the harmonization of data management and reporting. The meeting decided to establish a working group on geographic information systems (GIS) to specify functional specifications on the basis of user requirements. To improve the usage of stable indicators, the EEA will organize a workshop to provide reliable information for the marine and coastal environment and to promote a harmonized basis for the appropriate assessment. Furthermore,

the meeting stated that statistical tools in monitoring programs should be further refined to improve usefulness and validity of environmental monitoring. OSPAR will organize a workshop to improve the important aspects of data management like data access, information exchange, data availability and ownership. The workshop should also clarify the future common work of the IRF partners.

The meeting compiled a first overview on reporting procedures, e.g. type of reports, publication date and the linkages to political agendas, in order to avoid redundant work in assessment products. The matrix will be continuously completed and updated by the IRF secretariat.

During the meeting, the EEA claimed several times the interest on all kind of environmental data collected by the Regional Conventions. May it be that the EEA did not offer enough funds and resources for the desired data or may it be that the Conventions were afraid of losing a part of their original tasks and importance, at the end the meeting decided that the future cooperation and follow-up work between the EEA and the IRF will be carried out as flexible as possible and on the basis of recommendations.

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