



GESAMP

Joint Group of Experts on the
Scientific Aspects of Marine
Environmental Protection

GESAMP 52/7/1
5 September 2025
ENGLISH ONLY

52nd session
Agenda item 7

SCOPING ACTIVITIES

Proposed Terms of Reference and administrative details to establish a GESAMP working group to support the Large Marine Ecosystem Advisory Committee

Submitted by the coordinator of the LME scoping exercise

Background

1 At the 50th GESAMP annual session hosted by the International Seabed Authority (ISA) annual session hosted by the ISA in Kingston, Jamaica in 2023, UNDP proposed that GESAMP undertake a Scoping Exercise and create the GESAMP 'Correspondence Group and Scoping Activity on Large Marine Ecosystem Designation and Long-Term Scientific Support'. The aim of this Scoping Exercise was also presented to the LME Advisory Committee and the IW:LEARN (the International Waters Learning Exchange and Research Network) at the LME Consultative Workshop in Paris in 2024 with the draft Terms of Reference (ToR). The ToR were subsequently circulated to the Members and ExCom for amendment and approval.

Scoping exercise - summary of findings

2 The following points provide a summary of the findings of the scoping exercise:

- .1 The importance of 'Connectivity' within and across LMEs, both at the level of the EEZs and in relation to any adjacent ABNJ. Current LME projects sit primarily within coastal waters and EEZs and do not consider adjacent ABNJ and cross-boundary influences;
- .2 There are a number of existing mandates and associated regulations and guidelines which also apply in ABNJ, as well as within the EEZ and Territorial Seas;
- .3 The importance of other global processes and international agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (in particular Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas - EBSAs), the Convention on Migratory Species, Regional Seas Programmes, etc. Many of these do not address LMEs or acknowledge their presence;
- .4 The need for a review of the criteria for identifying LMEs that clearly exist beyond the EEZ and within the High Seas and the 'Area' (as defined by UNCLOS);
- .5 IW:LEARN to manage a survey/questionnaire out to the LME Community on how the 2017 Report recommendations may have been followed; and
- .6 The Advisory Committee has requested UNDP to propose a ToR for a new working group to GESAMP at its next annual session in Paris, France, in September 2025

Outcome of discussions with the Large Marine Ecosystem Advisory Committee

3 The LME Advisory Committee would wish to have UNDP submit a proposal to GESAMP to set up a Working Group that the LME Community could turn to for advice. Some of the primary aims of such a Working Group were discussed and currently constitute the draft Scope of work below.

Draft Terms of Reference

4 The draft ToR would include some of the information presented above. It would also include the following:

Scope of work

- .1 IW:LEARN to manage a survey/questionnaire out to the LME Community on how the 2017 Report recommendations may have been followed and share this with the WG;
- .2 Propose how the work of the LME Community could better interact with and support various regional and global Agreements e.g. CBD, RSP, CMS, UNCLOS, BBNJ, etc.;
- .3 How are LMEs generating science and how are they using it?
- .4 Identify potential donor and stakeholder support;
- .5 Determine the possible attributes and defining characteristics for Oceanic (High Seas) LMEs;
- .6 Identify some possible candidate areas using the modular approach (revised if necessary); and
- .7 Highlight the existing mandates in such areas that support stewardship and conservation (e.g. IMO, RFMOs, ISA).

Inter-agency cooperation

5 It is envisioned that this Working Group will support the mandates and programmes of work across all of the GESAMP Sponsoring Organizations that have mandates or interests in the activities within LMEs, be they coastal or oceanic/high seas. It will seek to identify areas of common scientific interest which will benefit all contributing agencies through: i) reducing the costs of scientific research and monitoring of trends; ii) securing the consistency of scientific advice; and iii) facilitating the coordination of UN agency activities within and across LMEs.

Administrative arrangements

6 The Working Group will be set up with the following structure and initial sponsorship, with further sponsorship contributions welcome upon establishment.

Name of working group: Working Group on Large Marine Ecosystems

Lead agency: UNDP

Involvement by other Sponsoring Organizations would be welcome, especially from the agencies that have clear remits/mandates on the High Seas (FAO, IMO, ISA, etc.)

Budget: TBD, sources may include SIDA and the UNDP-GEF Sargasso Sea Stewardship Project

Working Group Technical Secretary: To be provided by UNDP

Resource considerations

7 Funding sources may include SIDA and the UNDP GEF Sargasso Sea Stewardship Project, as well as current existing and future LME Projects (similar to the 1% compulsory inclusion of funds to support IW:LEARN that is in every LME project).

Tentative work plan

8 Should GESAMP and ExCom approve this new working group, the next steps as per the tentative workplan would be as follows:

- .1 identification of Chair and working group members: January-February 2026;
- .2 first meeting of the working group: March-April 2026;
- .3 deliver interim report (including provisional structure) by May 2020;
- .4 second meeting of the WG: June-July 2026 (alongside the LME Consultative Meeting and the LME Advisory Committee Meeting); and
- .5 report to IWC 11 (September 2026).

Proposed Terms of Reference

9 Lead Agency and other co-sponsors to set priorities based on the scope of work above and in collaboration with GESAMP.

Proposed profile for working group members:

- 10 The expertise required by the working group includes:
- .1 marine scientists with expertise in marine ecology and ecosystems, fisheries, marine biodiversity, marine protected areas and ABMTs generally;
 - .2 marine governance and law experts with 'hands-on' experience in UNCLOS, the BBNJ Agreement and other related legal and governance areas and treaties, Including Regional Seas Programmes, CBD, CMS, etc.; and
 - .3 social scientists with expertise including environmental and/or natural resource economics.

Action requested of GESAMP

11 GESAMP is invited to consider the establishment of this new working group as proposed by UNDP and previously discussed by the Members, and to provide feedback and guidance on the next steps.
