

# A Summary of Possibilities for Regional Cooperation

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Regionalism in the ocean environment is a theme whose time is coming, but is not quite here. The Draft Convention, emerging from the negotiations of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea, acknowledged the regional trend when, in Article 123, it called upon States bordering enclosed or semi-enclosed seas to co-ordinate their activities directly or through appropriate regional organizations with respect to living resources, the protection and preservation of the marine environment, and joint programs of scientific research in the area. The United Nations agencies have acknowledged the trend through such organizations as WECAFC, IOCARIBE, and the Caribbean Action Plan. The OAS is interested in marine regionalism, the Tinker Foundation is interested, the CDCC is interested. But marine regional cooperation in the Caribbean has not yet developed as it has in the Baltic, the North Sea, or the Mediterranean, despite the forces which favor it. In other words, the time here is not yet ripe for full-scale cooperation.

Countries tend to cooperate with one another in regional or subregional programs (1) if they perceive a common danger which can be most effectively handled through coordinated action; or (2) if they perceive a common advantage to be gained through such action. In either case, regional cooperation can be effected only if the obstacles of nationalism can be overcome. Governments are naturally reluctant to yield portions of their sovereignty (including control over finances) to any supra-national agency. One means of helping to overcome the barriers to cooperative action is through already-existing institutions or other mechanisms which tend to support regional action. The clearest example of this is the European Economic Community, whose members have developed common policies toward fisheries and other marine-related matters. And along Europe's southern borders, UNEP's Mediterranean Action Plan has been working to coordinate various ongoing regional marine efforts in order to make them as mutually supportive of one another as possible.

What has all this to do with the Caribbean? I believe that in discussing possibilities for regional cooperation here we should recognize two sets of forces — those that tend to divide the countries of the area so far as marine regional action is concerned, and those that might help to unite it. From this we might identify some potential forms of action which could assist in the unity movement.

## DIVISIVE FORCES

The most potent of these, as noted above, is simply nationalism, a parochial attitude toward international relations which all governments are guilty of to one degree or another. The ongoing "enclosure movement" of ocean space — the

<sup>1</sup>Views expressed are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the United States Government

establishment of 200-mile exclusive fisheries or economic zones — is, in the short term, a negative force toward cooperation. Countries want to explore the possibilities of the new ocean space which they have acquired, before subjecting their freedoms of action to the authority of regional bodies.

There are strong geographical differences among the Caribbean countries. Some are mainland States, others are islands or groups of islands. Some have interests in the Pacific as well as the Caribbean. Ought the Gulf of Mexico be included, at least for some purposes, as part of the Caribbean area? And there are wide differences in population totals. Mexico, for example, has nearly one thousand times as many people as Antigua.

There are political, ideological, and cultural differences, as well as differences in standards of living. The existing and former territories of the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and the United States each tend to have closer ties with one another than with other countries of the Caribbean.

Finally, there is a lack of genuine interest on the part of most governments (here as in other parts of the world) in meaningful regional action. The politicians have too many domestic issues to contend with to think seriously of investing in those regional or subregional programs where it actually costs them something to participate, in terms of wealth, personnel, the use of facilities, or enactment of restrictive national legislation in the interests of the common good. Don't feel that these divisive forces pertain only to the Caribbean; they exist for semi-enclosed seas throughout the world.

#### UNITING FORCES

In opposition to the divisive forces are those which tend to unite countries, particularly for special purposes. The Caribbean is a true semi-enclosed sea, in which countries exist in relative proximity with one another. They share the resources of the Sea with one another — its potential opportunities as well as its challenges. All of the Caribbean countries are members of the developing rather than the developed world, and as such have common aspirations, as expressed through the concept of the New International Economic Order. And all, of course, share in the general Latin American regional concept, a concept which has built up more strongly over the years in this part of the world than is the case in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific.

Earlier in this paper I suggested that countries would respond more favorably to regional suggestions if they could perceive either common dangers or common advantages to be gained through cooperation. This, of course, is true with respect to all types of activities — defense, economic unions, river basin commissions, regional universities, and others. But we are talking here specifically about the marine environment; what are the real or potential dangers and opportunities which might foster closer regional or subregional opportunities?

The two common dangers, I believe, are environmental degradation and natural disasters. Degradation is taken here to include not only marine pollution in its various forms, but also biological damage to living marine resources. Probably the most serious form of natural disaster in the Caribbean are the hurricanes which periodically wrack the area. But by what means can these common dangers be averted or ameliorated through regional action? Through the scientific and data gathering activities of IOCARIBE and WECAFC? Through the environmental

efforts of a Caribbean Action Plan? Through the atmospheric programs of WMO? The answer in all three cases is "yes," but note that these are primarily outside agencies, organs of the United Nations system, whose success, at least superficially, requires relatively few "investments" on the part of the Caribbean countries themselves, other than membership in the respective bodies.

What about common advantages to be gained through regional action? There are fisheries development programs of FAO and UNDP. There are efforts toward building up regional science centers by IOC. Here, as in other regional seas, UNEP may in time establish a regional oil combating center. But on the development side, the situation is somewhat different than with respect to the perceived dangers. The States of the Caribbean are actually doing something about joint development, as evidenced by such programs as CARICOM, ODECA, and LAFTA. Slow as these organizations may be in moving toward their ultimate integrative goals, they represent an important long-term trend in Middle America toward closer regional cooperation — a trend toward which responses have come from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and from private investment groups located outside the Caribbean area.

#### THE INTERACTIONS OF EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PROCESSES

The movement toward economic integration in the Caribbean area is a slow and difficult one: genuine progress is sometimes measured in decades. There are so many issues involved in the agricultural, commercial and industrial sectors of nearly two dozen countries. But we here are not thinking of the twenty-first century. What prospects are there for regional cooperation in the near-term? Although in time we can expect some spill-overs into ocean affairs from economic integration schemes, in the immediate time frame, I don't expect much to develop.

A second external force are the UN specialized agencies. If we look to them for support for regional cooperation, there are several difficulties. One is that these agencies have world-wide responsibilities, and whatever funding or other support they render to the Caribbean area must be at the expense of support for West Africa, Southeast Asia, or some other area. The administrators of FAO, UNEP, IOC, UNDP, and other groups must continuously ask themselves, what special priorities does the Caribbean area have?

Another difficulty concerns levels of interaction among the UN bodies with respect to the Caribbean area. To what extent is it incumbent upon these organizations to modify their programs in the interests of regional cooperation? In planning for its operations in the Caribbean, for example, FAO's Department of Fisheries is responsible to the FAO Council, not to some regional Caribbean body, so far as seeing to it that its responsibilities have been successfully carried out. Rivalries are bound to exist in Paris, Rome and Geneva with respect to one agency's activities in the Caribbean relative to those of other bodies with the result that even here some of the potential efficiencies may at times be lost.

Levels of overall funding pose another potential difficulty. Much of the development support comes from UNDP, but in an era of inflation and of tight budgets, the program potentials of past years may have to be reduced. Similarly for UNEP, the expectations of funding for a Caribbean Action Plan may have to be somewhat lowered.

It was noted earlier that international banks and lending agencies may constitute an external force, probably more for subregional than for regional cooperation. One issue here is that such agencies have traditionally been concerned more with land than with marine-related activities, although the two forms meet in the coastal zone. Equally important is the fact that such organizations tend to be interested in plans which originate in the area concerned, and which are demonstrably viable, so far as operations and the prospects for repayment are concerned. Here is a case where two or more countries of the Caribbean can play a critical role in attracting development support for subregional marine-related projects.

National governments, both from within and outside the Caribbean area, give support to programs and projects through direct aid or through loans, although it must be acknowledged that such support tends to be channelled through individual countries for their own use. Private agencies, such as the Ford, Rockefeller, or Tinker Foundations, may prove more amenable to supporting subregional or regional efforts. There are also private institutions, such as the University of Miami, or the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, which in one way or another, work in support of regional projects in the Caribbean.

It is not the intention here to enumerate all of the external and internal groups and institutions in the Caribbean which might be working toward closer regional cooperation. Although to a small group of marine specialists the list may seem impressive, in terms of overall Caribbean activities it actually is rather small. Most countries of the Caribbean area have not committed themselves seriously to the concept of marine regionalism, such exceptions as there may be to this are largely certain islands of the Lesser Antilles. In other words, marine regionalism in the Caribbean still exists largely in the minds of certain specialists, many of whom are here today. The question then is, how does this concept get translated into effective action?

#### POTENTIAL COURSES OF ACTION

We seem to face a potential dichotomy. On the one hand there are more institutional programs and projects of a marine regional nature in the Caribbean than in probably all other non-European regional seas. Yet on the other hand there is relatively little meaningful progress toward marine regional action, and I do not feel that prospects on the horizon at this point are particularly bright, except in a few, highly-specialized situations. What then might be a potential course of action?

I would suggest that the first thing that is needed is more information — more hard facts — on (1) marine-related issues in the Caribbean which might effectively be handled through subregional or regional action; (2) the principal institutional mechanisms, both within and outside the Caribbean, which might be used in support of regional action; and (3) strategies which might be employed for harnessing these mechanisms, either alone or in cooperative actions, to further viable regional programs and projects. The data is needed for two time frames, the decade of the 1980's, and the period to the end of the century.

What this suggests is a series of studies leading ultimately to the compilation of one or more comprehensive plans. One set of studies should concern itself with the living marine resources, another with the protection and preservation of the marine environment, and a third with marine scientific research. Other studies could be involved with coastal zone management, shipping, and the recreation industry.

While no one institution associated with the Caribbean is probably large enough to be responsible for carrying out all the studies, there should be some central point for coordinating these efforts. I do not at this point suggest where this center should be.

After a year or two of data gathering there should be a conference on marine regionalism, held somewhere within the Caribbean area to discuss the results of the investigations. It is important that at this conference there be representatives from Caribbean governments and institutions, from outside agencies such as those from the UN, the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank; and representatives from concerned government agencies in non-Caribbean countries and from private institutions and groups concerned with marine regionalism in the area. The *Proceedings* of this conference would be published, along with the separate studies which formed the basis for the conference.

A third step, to be undertaken perhaps under the auspices of OAS or some other appropriate organization would be the compilation of a specific Caribbean Regional Marine Program, whose outlines would be based on the outcome of the first two activities. This compilation and design could be carried out by a relatively small number of experts working over a period of months. The published results could then be given wide circulation at national and international levels. Armed with the details of a proposed Caribbean Regional Program, proponents of regional action would then be in a stronger position to approach national governments, international organizations, public and private funding agencies, and other groups in search of support for meaningful action.

The three-stage process would probably take 3 to 4 years from its inception. During that interval other activities would, of course, be taking place in support of various forms of marine regional action. Hopefully, by the time the program for a comprehensive Caribbean regional plan is published, the new Law of the Sea Treaty may have come into force, thereby strengthening the basis for regional action in semi-enclosed seas.

This paper is not an exhaustive summary of the possibilities for regional cooperation in the Caribbean. In fact it has presented more negative than positive aspects for successful regional action. But its primary thrust, given these potential obstacles, is that some positive, comprehensive action is needed in the directions of data gathering, analysis, recommendations, and finally promotional activities. Without this, the tremendous potential for effective marine regional programs in the Caribbean may take many years, indeed decades, to realize.