



Pioneering UN atlas of oceans turns five Expert-run website the definitive source for information on world oceans

7 June 2007, Rome - FAO and a group of 14 partner organizations are celebrating World Ocean day by marking the fifth anniversary of the UN Atlas of the Oceans. The atlas is a pioneering online encyclopaedia containing a wealth of information on the world's oceans that is maintained collaboratively by an international network of expert editors.

The atlas was launched in 2002 by a group of UN agencies and their partners -- constituting some of the world's foremost ocean agencies -- amid mounting concern over the continuing deterioration of marine and coastal ecosystems with the goal of helping to reverse this decline and promote the sustainable development of oceans. Overfishing, destruction of coastal habitat and pollution from industry, farms and households are endangering not only fish -- an important source of animal protein in the human diet -- but also are also affecting marine biodiversity and even the global climate.

The atlas allows policymakers, resource managers, academics and experts to access, contribute and continuously update and expand human knowledge on these issues -- and their possible solutions.

"The basic idea is to pool knowledge and expertise from around the globe in one easy-to-use tool that can deepen our understanding of marine environments and help promote a shared, coherent vision for ocean management," said Jorge Csirke, Director of FAO's Fisheries and Aquaculture Management Division and the UN Atlas Project Director.

A wiki approach

Currently the atlas contains 4 000 entries on a vast range of themes, ranging from fisheries biology to ocean law to undersea prospecting for pharmaceuticals to maritime transport and telecommunications. (See full list, right).

Each topic listing provides background information, lists UN agency programme roles and involved organizations, describes relevant legal and policy frameworks, identifies research needs, and gives an assessment of what the future holds.

These entries are maintained by a network of 42 volunteer expert editors, with another 7,000+ plus "members" who receive regular updates on new or altered atlas content, contribute to the content and give feedback to the editors.

Contact:

George Kourous
Media Relations,
FAO

george.kourous@fao.org
(+39) 06 570 53168
(+39) 348 141 6802

Related links

[UN Atlas of the
Oceans](#)

Topics covered by the atlas

Uses of the oceans - covers the main types of use of the ocean's living and non-living resources with the following sub-topics:

- Fisheries and aquaculture
- Recreation and tourism
- Transportation and telecommunication
- Human settlements on the coast
- Offshore oil, gas and mining
- Energy
- Marine biotechnology
- Ocean dumping and ship wastes
- Disposal of waste from land

Ocean issues - the main issues affecting the uses of the ocean and their overall governance are catalogued and described here under cross-cutting and broad topics:

- Climate variability/climate change
- Economics
- Emergencies
- Food Security
- Governance
- Human health
- Pollution and degradation
- Safety
- Sustainable development

About the Oceans - an encyclopaedic collection of information about the oceans, organized in the following areas:

- How Oceans were formed
- How Oceans are changing
- Maps, statistics and online

About 100 000 people access the UN Atlas of the Oceans website each month.

A global partnership

Acting under the UN-OCEANS framework, fifteen UN and non-UN organizations make up the atlas partnership, with FAO serving as the coordinating Secretariat: the International Atomic Energy Agency, the International Maritime Organization, the International Seabed Authority, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Environment Programme, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the World Meteorological Organization, the Census of Marine Life, Russia's Head Department of Navigation and Oceanography, the National Geographic Society, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the World Ocean Observatory and the World Resources Institute. The partnership received its initial start-up funding from the nonprofit United Nations Foundation.

Contact:

George Kourous
Media Relations, FAO
george.kourous@fao.org
(+39) 06 570 53168
(+39) 348 141 6802

databases
Ocean dynamics
Physical & chemical properties
Ocean-atmosphere interface
Biology
Ecology
Coasts & coral reefs
Monitoring & observing systems
Research
Education & training
International cooperation
Early explorations
The oceans of the future

comments? please write to the webmaster

© FAO, 2008