

**Framework Convention
for the Protection of the Marine
Environment of the Caspian Sea**



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**CONFERENCE OF THE PARTIES
Sixth Meeting
19-21 October 2022, Baku, Azerbaijan**

**Working Group on (Environmental) Monitoring, Assessment (and Information Exchange)
(abbreviated as WGMA)**

(Note by the interim Secretariat)

Introduction

At its 5th Meeting, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, 30 May 2014, the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention (COP5) reviewed the *Regional framework and network for the Tehran Convention and Protocol compliance monitoring and assessment* (Annex II, TC/COP5/5). The framework focused on updating and supporting the Environmental Monitoring Programme (EMP) earlier welcomed by COP4, Moscow, Russian Federation, 10-12 December 2012 and the preparation of the State of The Caspian Environment (SoE) Reports, based on agreed procedures. It furthermore addressed the operationalization of the Caspian Environment Information Centre (CEIC) as the central hub and database for national reporting, SoE reporting, policy making and public information exchange, and contained guidance for collaboration with CASPCOM. Given the need for implementation of the Framework, COP5 decided to establish a Working Group on Monitoring (WGMA).

At the first Preparatory Committee Meeting for COP6 (PrepCom1), Baku, Azerbaijan, 24-27 November 2014, the Representatives of the Contracting Parties requested TCIS to invite the Contracting Parties to nominate up to two members of the WGMA and to prepare terms of reference (TOR) for consideration and approval by PrepCom2 and COP6.

By letter of 27 February 2015, the Contracting Parties were requested to nominate up to two members of the WGMA.

At PrepCom2, in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan, 31 May – 3 June 2015, the Representatives of the Contracting Parties reviewed the name and Terms of Reference (TOR) of the WGMA and decided that the Group would function under the auspices of the TC Secretariat. The nominated members of the WGMA met informally, elected Mr. Alexander Postnov, Deputy Director of the State Oceanographic Institute, Roshydromet, Russian Federation as Acting Chair, and agreed on the work in the months ahead.

In the following years, the WGMA held six meetings, most times back-to-back with the negotiations on the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange. CASPCOM representatives attended several of these meetings as observers and made substantial contributions. During its meetings the WGMA:

- Agreed on a set of common Caspian Regional Water Quality Standards based on the list of Maximum Allowable Concentrations of pollutants in the sea water legally established in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Russian Federation and Turkmenistan complemented with a couple of additional parameters proposed by IR of Iran.

- Reached a preliminary agreement on using the Probable Effect Levels (PELs) from the Canadian system as Interim Regional Guidelines for quality of the Caspian Sea bottom sediments. The initial stage will involve only a limited number of parameters to comply with the country's monitoring capabilities
- Reviewed the degree of preparedness of the Caspian littoral states to putting the Caspian Environment Monitoring Program (EMP) into implementation and proposed that TCIS undertakes a survey aiming at identifying the country's efforts to start the EMP implementation in the near future.
- Reviewed the Table of Contents and the final text of the State of the Caspian Sea Environment Report (SoE2) and made recommendations regarding its structure and procedures for drafting the future SoE reports.
- Addressed procedures for initial monitoring data exchange and quality control and requirements for a Regional Monitoring Data Centre including its possible establishment as a part of the Caspian Environment Information Centre (CEIC).

At PrepCom-7, in Baku, Azerbaijan, 16-20 September 2019, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan informed that, in light of the proposed terms and content of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange, both the title and the TOR of the WGMA deserve clarification. It was agreed that the Contracting Parties would provide TCIS with their proposals for amendments within two weeks, i.e. by 8 October 2019 at the latest.

Following the request Russian Federation provided suggestions to the name – WGMA should stand for Working Group on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange - and TOR of the WGMA.

By the letter of 8 October 2019, Kazakhstan informed that during the review of the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange, it turned out that many of the provisions of the draft require additional discussion, including the name of the Protocol, the goals and objectives of the Protocol etc. In this regard, Kazakhstan found the consideration of the Terms of Reference of the WGMA premature.

On 7 April 2020, in a meeting of the NCLOs it was agreed that TCIS would request the Contracting Parties to review the TOR and composition of the WGMA and provide their comments and proposals.

Azerbaijan in its reaction suggested, inter alia, that the WGMA is a temporary body established by the COP for the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols and should therefore not be referred to in the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange. Consequently, in the negotiations on the Protocol the reference to the WGMA in the text of the Protocol was deleted.

Regarding further WGMA activities, Kazakhstan, stating that the Caspian littoral States had not agreed on the expediency of establishing a permanent Working Group on Monitoring and its Terms of Reference, proposed the title of the meetings to be changed for "*Meeting of experts to develop proposals on monitoring the Caspian Sea environment for the Programme of Work*". Kazakhstan also proposed that the meetings should not address the matters related to the SoE reporting, since there had been no consensus to include this item in the TOR of the WGMA.

Taking into account proposals of Kazakhstan which had led to de-facto suspension of the WGMA activities and ensuring the continuity the regional co-operation on environmental monitoring and assessment, TCIS initiated a series of virtual Technical Meetings of experts under the Environment Monitoring Programme which were held in 2021 and early 2022.

All three Technical Meetings of experts were moderated by, Mr. Alexander Postnov, the acting Chair of the WGMA.

At the first meeting (March 2021), the Participants identified a review and updating of the EMP – stipulated in the draft Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange as the basic framework for monitoring and information management and exchange in support of the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols - as most important and urgent activity in the field of the Caspian environmental monitoring and assessment. To this end, it was agreed that TCIS would develop and disseminate a questionnaire describing views of the Parties on the basics of the EMP.

At their second meeting (October 2021), the Participants discussed the results and responses to the questionnaire issued by TCIS. They recommended, inter alia, to harmonize the goals of the EMP fully with the definition of EMP in the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange. At the present stage of negotiations, the EMP in the draft Protocol is defined as “an agreed document containing main directions of environmental monitoring activities and arrangements/measures implemented by the Parties in support of national and regional policies and decision making (related to the implementation of the Convention and its Protocols)”.

The third Technical Meeting focused on the parameters to be observed by the EMP, both obligatory and optional for all Parties, as it appeared from their responses to Questionnaire distributed by TCIS. The meeting recommended TCIS, inter alia, to elaborate, based on EMP-2012 and other relevant sources, a set of vital parameters indispensable for a proper description of the Caspian Sea state of environment with an indication of the states which consider each parameter obligatory. Another recommendation was to develop and disseminate a Questionnaire to the Parties with the view to identify the reasons why the Parties view certain vital parameters as optional.

Following these recommendations, in September 2022, TCIS developed and sent out to the Parties a draft *List of Indispensable Substances Whose Data Are Vital to Assess the Caspian State of Environment* and a draft *Additional questionnaire aimed at identification of the nature of gaps in the Party's monitoring capabilities*. The Parties are kindly invited to react to those documents to facilitate planning of the forthcoming technical meetings and making them most productive.

The Regional framework and network for the Tehran Convention and Protocol compliance monitoring and assessment, basis for the Decision of COP5 to establish a WGMA, clearly addressed all the areas – monitoring, assessment, information exchange – of the Protocol presently under negotiation.

Taking that into consideration and in the understanding that the WGMA functioning as an advisory body to and under the auspices of the Secretariat of the Tehran Convention exist until the Parties/COP decides otherwise, it is therefore proposed that its TOR be as follows:

1. Develop regional institutional and operational procedures for a sustainable marine environment monitoring system, including the existing networks of national monitoring institutions;
2. Ensure harmonization of the monitoring systems of the Contracting Parties through gap analysis of the required monitoring capacity and study the compatibility of national methodologies, including identification of resource requirements;
3. Develop common regional guidelines for the implementation of the Environmental Monitoring Program (EMP) taking into account national standards and including a common and compatible quality assurance system;
4. Develop/harmonize marine environment indicators and quality standards, including physico-chemical, biological, ecological, and socio-economic, and prepare guidelines for their compliance;
5. Prepare recommendations on the development of a hierarchy of goals and objectives and introduction of water quality objectives based on the marine environment quality standards;
6. Keep under review the implementation of the EMP and provide advice on issues arising during its implementation, including ways of building capacity, testing implementation mechanisms in pilot monitoring, etc.;
7. Provide inputs and methodological support to the preparation of State of the Caspian Sea Environment Reports, including the development of draft principles for the formation of a pool of experts and the consideration and approval of the draft Reports;
8. Develop procedures for regular exchange of technical and scientific monitoring and assessment related information among the Contracting Parties, through the Secretariat, including metadata criteria for regional data warehouses;

9. Develop mechanisms for forecasting the dynamics of the level of sea water pollution.

If necessary, the present terms of reference may be reviewed pursuant to the decision of the Conference of the Parties to the Tehran Convention.

The above-mentioned tasks and responsibilities of the WGMA should be reviewed and adapted to the relevant needs and requirements of the Protocol on Monitoring, Assessment and Information Exchange once agreed upon.

The WGMA will be composed of up to two representatives of each Contracting Party. Parties may send any number of experts to assist officially designated representatives during their meetings.

The WGMA shall be established and its composition decided by the COP.

The Chair of the WGMA shall be elected from its members and may be reelected every two years.

Suggested action

The Conference may wish to endorse the terms of reference of the WGMA and request the Contracting Parties to confirm or change their representatives.

Annex

Actual Composition of the Working Group on Monitoring and Assessment**Acting Chair**

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