1998 - THE UNITED NATIONS "YEAR OF THE OCEANS"

The Third Ocean

The Indian Ocean is both in size and age the third ocean. It came into existence after the Pacific and Atlantic Ocean. The Pacific Ocean measures 181 million square kilometres and contains 714 cubic kilometres of water. The Atlantic Ocean has a surface area of 107 square kilometres and holds 351 million square kilometres and contains 285 cubic kilometres of water.

The explanation for the smaller size of the Indian Ocean is straightforward: it is the only ocean that does not reach from pole to pole. The enormous land mass of the Eurasian continent blocks the ocean water to the north. As a result, the Indian Ocean is in fact only a half ocean, with a unique, periodic reversal of the monsoon from South-West to South-East, and, tied in with the South-East monsoon, an upwelling of cold, salty, and nutritive deep-sea water along the northeastern coast of Africa.

It is precisely this unique character of the Indian Ocean which caused the Netherlands Marine Research Foundation (SOZ) to initiate the Netherlands Indian Ocean Programm, 1990-1995. The core of this programme is the Indian Ocean expedition of the 'Tyro', a research vessel with a length of ninety metres, which took place from May 1992 until April 1993.

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A Prospectus for Development -- Introduction

The oceans are a necessary element of life as we know it. We are far from understanding all its complexities and processes and yet we are corrupting its margins with our development and threatening its ecology with our activities. In recognition of the importance of the marine environment and the issues to be addressed, the United Nations has declared 1998 to be the 'Year of the Oceans'. It is an opportunity for all levels of government, and for each individual, to reflect on the situation and to consider the actions needed to undertake our common responsibility to sustain one of the world's greatest benefits and common responsibility.

Part of the need is to make governments, and the individuals they represent, aware about the continuous and the bountiful resources available from the oceans, if they are developed in a sustainable manner. Our marine and coastal actvities must be managed in harmony with the ocean environment. To do this we need an adequate base of knowledge and information on which wise decisions can be founded.

The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO is a United Nations specialized body dedicated to ocean science, observations, mutual information and assistance. It functions through the concerted action of its 125 Member States cooperating in regional and global ocean programs. It is obviously deeply interested in encourging activities during the Year of the Oceans in 1998, which will increase the visibility and awareness of ocean issues. One of these proposed activities is a global capacity and awareness buidling cruise or series of cruises for oceanographic research vessels.

What is Required

Expressions of interest are urgently required from developmental agencies and from ship operators. Plans and costs have to be prepared. Daily running costs of research vessels range from about US$ 30,000 depending on the size of the vessel. The capacity and capability of vessels to conduct effective programs would have to be assessed. Platforms may be avaliable from both developed and developing countries.

The UN "Year of the Oceans" should provide an opportunity for governments, agencies and institutions and engaged individuals to act together on behalf of the ocean environment. Without any commitment at this stage, it would be most helpful to learn of any possible interest on the part of development agencies and the ocean area(s) of that interest. We would also need to know from ship operators, the potential availability of vessles, their capacity and capability and again the ocean area(s) in which they would consider being deployed.

The Oceans Charter

The undersigned agree: The oceans and their resources are a necessary element of life on this planet.

The health of the oceans and the sustainability of the renewable resources, together with the wise and safe uses of its other bounties must be an axiom for all governments to accept and honour for the long-term benefit and existence of their respective and collective peoples.

The acquisition of the knowledge necessary for the understanding and stewardship of the oceans and their adjacent seas and for the adoption of policies, standards and regulations to protect the ocean environment and to husban its resources, are goals to be pursued both nationally and internationally.

There must be mutual assistance and the will to work together to achieve common goals for the oceans - adjacent and regional coastal states cooperate in the adoption of local policies and actions - countries with knowledge and resources should assist less fortunate neighbours - data and information for global and regional problems should be readily available - States should make use of international and intergovernmental organisation to generate global programmes and agreements.

*** The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO in their Prospectus for Development Twenty-ninth Session of the Executive Council held in Paris, 24 September - 4 October 1996 a Provisional Agenda for celebrating 1998 as the International Year of the Ocean was brought out. The information in this section is taken from that document.**

Acting on behalf of our governments, we recognize the wisdom of acting in unison to protect the oceans and to use its resources in a sustainable manner and accept this Ocean Character as a basis for future action.

Signed in the Year of the Oceans, 1998

Oceans Education for 1998

1998 has been declared the UN Year of the Oceans. To celebrate the event, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO is coordinating several activities that will enhance global awareness of the ocean and will promote governmental and public interest in issues and programs relating to the ocean.

Environmental science is an accepted part of the curricula of many schools. For the Year of the Ocean in 1998, attention should be given to the supply of project ideas, educational material and teaching aids to educational ministries and school boards.

It is expected that much of the necessary information exists and needs to be organized and collated. Costs could be minimized if countries cooperated on the exchange of materials, ideas and in some cases in the investment of joint programs.

The interest of your youth in the long term preservation of the oceans and the sustainability of its resources is absolutely critical.

Project ideas

For all countries it should be possible to give encouragement and to pass along ideas to the education system for little cost. With the participation of Member States, it may be possible to prepare an IOC, or even an ICSPRO, sponsored brochure setting out ways in which classes and schools could undertake activities to commemorate the Year of the Oceans.

Such activities could include self generated activities such as:

- class projects on selected ocean topics, bibliographiescould be provided.
- research projects, on selected ocean topics, bibliographies could be provided
- educational projects, beach and river surveys, monitoring, sampling, salmon counts
- environmental activities, beach clean-ups etc.
- laboratory activities, fish hatching and release, aquariums etc.
- invited speakers
- career counselling

Educational Material

The various related organizations, experiments and programs could be requested to donate appropriate material on their activities for use at different levels of the school system. These could be made available electronically and in a form suitable for reproduction and distribution.

Much of this material is in existence but will require organization and possible editing before distribution. The identification of sources of additional documentation for follow-up studies should be an important part of the activity.

Where resources are available, countries may prepare national material for distribution. In cases where such documentation is appropriate for wider use, the access and distribution of such material to other countries should be facilitated. To have a generally effective program, School Boards may wish to make collective arrangements with appropriate laboratories and/or organisations, such as field trips, speakers, competitions, etc.

Teaching Aids

Some educational systems may wish to coordinate the material and ideas into more formalized programs for teaching, including guidance in the application. Where such material and/or plans can be shared the authorities are encouraged to facilitate cooperation.

Other Programs

Some International programs may be already available at the global or regional level for the use of Member States. The UNESCO document for youth, Rescue Mission Planet Earth, is an example, another is the school program that Expo'98 has initiated the Portugal and surrounding countries.

Where to send response or queries

The organisers of the International Year of Oceans would much appreciate receiving your response to this letter sent to:

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with a copy to:

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