

Second Ministerial Meeting

Environment ministers in Guinea Current area agree on a permanent body to manage ecosystem

By Olu SarrACCRA 2 July – Environment Ministers of 16 West and Central African countries agreed Friday to the creation of the Guinea Current Commission and accepted Ghana’s offer to host the new regional body. This far-reaching decision by the Committee of Ministers of the Environment, who met in the Ghanaian capital Accra, is designed to streamline and bolster the management of the region’s Large Marine Ecosystem, an endangered body of water and 5,560 kilometres of coastline stretching from Guinea-Bissau to the northern Angolan Province of Cabinda. The Committee of Environment Ministers agree on 2 July to set Guinea Current Commission

“The Committee, for the first time, institutionalises the ad hoc LME project and paves the way for a sustainable institution within a timeframe of five years,” Dr Stephen Maxwell Donkor, the Executive Secretary/Regional Coordinator of the Interim Guinea Commission/Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem, said.

The Committee of Ministers, in this their second meeting, agreed that the new commission be set up in line with the Abuja Declaration. In what is now known as the Osu Declaration, adopted at the end of their daylong meeting, they also mandated the Executive Secretariat to consult further with Member States and partners on specific articles “to ensure clarity” on the financial commitments to the new Commission. These consultations will be pursued through the designated working group of five Member States and five United Nations agencies.

Under the Osu Declaration, the Executive Secretary is also mandated to consult the Gulf of Guinea Commission in Angola and with regional and sub-regional fisheries bodies, to define “roles and responsibilities, linkages and interfaces and to document these in written agreements such as Memoranda of Members of the Working Group Angola, Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Gabon, Nigeria, the UN Food and Agricultural Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the United Nations Development Programme”. Consultations are to be ended by November 2010 and final documents completed for confirmation, preferably during the 9th Convention of Parties of the Abidjan Convention. Furthermore, the Ministers approved the proposed component outcomes and outputs of the draft Project Identification Form (PIF) for a Global Environment Facility-supported project for the execution of the Strategic Action Programme. This Programme outlines policy that sets out the legal, institutional changes and investments required to resolve the Guinea Current region’s foremost trans-boundary marine ecosystem issues. On co-financing, the ministers recommended that the Executive Secretary undertake “well-prepared advocacy meetings” in all countries in close liaison with the national directors.

Till now, the 16-nation Guinea Current Large Marine Ecosystem (GCLME) project had been overseen by an Interim Guinea Current Commission. The transition from an interim to a full commission will mark the attainment of the goal, expressed by the Ministers in the Abuja Declaration of 2006, for a regional network with broad stakeholder input and for the running of sustainable institutional structure to tackle the problems of the region’s marine ecosystem. A holistic approach is deemed the best way to manage the Guinea Current marine ecosystem.

The Guinea Current area is one of the world's richest in marine resources, with some 239 fish species among which the most common are the coastal **THE GUINEA CURRENT LARGE MARINE ECOSYSTEM REGION**

- Stretches north to south between latitudes 25° N and 13° S; west to east between the longitudes 20° W and 32° E
 - Land surface area 8 340 200 km²
 - Oceanic section stretches over 5 560 km of coast from the Bijagos archipelago in Guinea-Bissau to the mouth of the Congo River
 - Regions population between 280 and 300 million
 - Marine section surface area around 350 000 km² and 2.6 million km² for the total of Exclusive Economic Zones pelagics sardinella and horse mackerel. It is continually being raided of its marine life, being polluted from land- and sea-based sources such as industrial waste, under stress from unplanned and rapid growth of coastal megacities such as Lagos and Accra, and the associated human activity is eroding coastlines. These and the depletion of resources are destroying vital spawning coastal habitats and their flora and fauna. A Guinea Current Commission may be better placed to spearhead the protection of this area of vital importance to its tens of millions of inhabitants.
- The Accra ministerial meeting was preceded by a two-day gathering of the Interim Guinea Current Commission’s Steering Committee, the technical body that reviewed documentation for submission to the ministers.