

International Council for the
Exploration of the Sea

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Fisheries Improvement Committee

Report on the 6th Session of the United Nations Joint Group
of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution
(GESAMP) in Geneva, 22-28 March 1974

by

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The 6th Session of GESAMP was held at the World Health Organization Headquarters in Geneva during the period 22-28 March 1974, under the Chairmanship of Dr G. Berge. The approved Agenda is attached. A full report of the meeting was approved and should be published shortly. The following notes summarize briefly the more important matters discussed.

1 Review of harmful substances

As agreed at the 5th Session of GESAMP a Working Group chaired by Dr H. A. Cole had prepared further material on organic compounds and had completely revised, with substantial additions, the sections on several metals and radioactivity. The Review was discussed in considerable detail and it was agreed that, although updating might be required from time to time, the work could be regarded as complete. GESAMP agreed that, with the addition of (i) a list of the key reference works, (ii) the names of the experts who had at various times been associated with the Review, (iii) a number of additional comments, the Review should be published as a separate document. A number of difficulties have since arisen and it is likely that the Review will be discussed again at the 7th Session of GESAMP.

2 Impact of oil on the marine environment

The Working Group established at the 5th Session of GESAMP had not been able to meet in full, due to shortage of funds. A meeting of some members of the Working Group was held immediately prior to the 6th Session and had drawn up a work plan. This envisaged that each member of the Working Group would draw up a document on one of a number of topics identified as being controversial. The document would be a critical review of a number of references which would be circulated to other members for comment. GESAMP approved the proposed work plan and suggested a number of small amendments and two further topics for consideration, namely the effect of oil on (a) oxygen transfer at the air/water interface (b) the absorption of other pollutants. It also recommended that consideration should be given to the effect of oil under different climatic conditions.

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3 Specification of parameters for a marine monitoring system

Again, owing to shortage of funds the Working Group established at the 5th Session had not been able to meet. However, the chairman of the Working Group, Dr Goldberg, informed GESAMP that in his opinion the terms of reference and membership of the group should be revised. This was accepted and a new Working Group consisting of two panels was established. These panels would consider separately the levels of pollutants in the environment and the biological effects of pollutants, and it was agreed that the two panels would meet jointly on occasions and produce a coordinated report.

4 Interchange of pollutants between atmosphere and oceans

GESAMP noted that the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) had established a panel on the Atmospheric Aspects of Environmental Pollution, which was to meet in May 1974. It agreed that air/sea interchange was an important factor in environmental pollution, and expressed the view that assessment of the dry fallout and washout of pollutants from the air to the ocean should be encouraged. They also noted that particular attention should be given to the fate of contaminants in the atmosphere, especially in relation to u/v radiation. The possibility of establishing a GESAMP Working Group on this topic was discussed but a decision was deferred, pending more definite proposals from the WMO which agreed to form an ad hoc group in the interim for this purpose.

5 Basic information required for the selection of sites for the disposal of waste into the sea

As agreed at the 5th Session of GESAMP, a Working Group had been established to discuss this topic. It had met in Rome under the Chairmanship of Dr Kullenberg and had produced a preliminary report, which was presented to GESAMP for comment. In general this was well received, although there was severe criticism over the lack of consideration of biological aspects. However, as there was no biologist present at the Working Group's first meeting, this was not surprising and several suggestions were made for improving this aspect of the report. It was agreed that the preliminary report would provide a good basis for the final report and that, in accordance with previous practice, it should be Annexed to the Report of the 6th Session, but with a foreword emphasizing its preliminary nature.

6 Principles for developing Coastal Water Quality Criteria

Although it had been agreed at the 5th Session that a Working Group should be established on this topic, the membership had not been finalized and no meeting had been held, owing to lack of funds. GESAMP agreed that work should start as soon as possible and noted that already several groups were awaiting a report.

7 Scientific aspects of pollution arising from the exploration and exploitation of the sea bed

GESAMP noted the increased interest in the exploration and exploitation of mineral deposits in and beneath the sea bed and the varied potential problems

that such activities posed. It was agreed that a new Working Group should be established under the Chairmanship of Dr H. A. Cole and terms of reference were drawn up. The Working Group will among other items consider the effects of dredging and sand and gravel extraction and will be informed of ICES activities in this field.

8 Hazard profiles of Harmful Substances

GESAMP was informed of the use made of the GESAMP IV/19 Supp. 1 document at the International Conference on Marine Pollution 1973 and subsequently by the Marine Environmental Pollution Committee (MEPC) of IMCO. In particular, it noted the request of the MEPC that it should examine the tentative hazard ratings given to a number of substances, in case new information was now available. GESAMP concluded that in some cases new information was available and that in others the decisions taken by the MEPC appeared to include several errors. A document was drawn up for IMCO with a suggested course of action based on these conclusions.

GESAMP also noted that IMCO would require further hazard profiles of substances carried by ships and agreed to establish a Working Group for this purpose under the Chairmanship of Dr P. G. Jeffery, and gave it terms of reference which ensure that it will act as a sorting body for information supplied to IMCO by its member governments, rather than as a data collection service. It was further agreed that this same Working Group should be responsible for any necessary updating of the Review of Harmful Substances.

9 Date and place of next meeting

It was agreed unanimously that Dr G. Berge should continue as Chairman of GESAMP, with Prof A. I. Simonov as Vice-Chairman, for the intersessional period and for the 7th Session (IMCO, London, 3-9 April 1975).

AGENDA

for the 6th Session of the Joint Group of Experts
on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Pollution (GESAMP)
held at WHO Headquarters, Geneva,
from 22 March at 10.00 a. m. to 28 March 1974

- 1 Adoption of the Agenda
- 2 Further elaboration of the Review of Harmful Substances
- 3 Impact of oil on the marine environment
- 4 Specification of physical, chemical and biological parameters to be monitored in an evolving marine pollution monitoring system
- 5 Interchange of pollutants between atmosphere and oceans
- 6 Preliminary discussion of basic information required for the selection of sites for the disposal of wastes into the sea
- 7 Date and place of next session
- 8 Other matters
- 9 Election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman for the next intersessional period and for the 7th Session
- 10 Consideration and approval of the Report of the Session