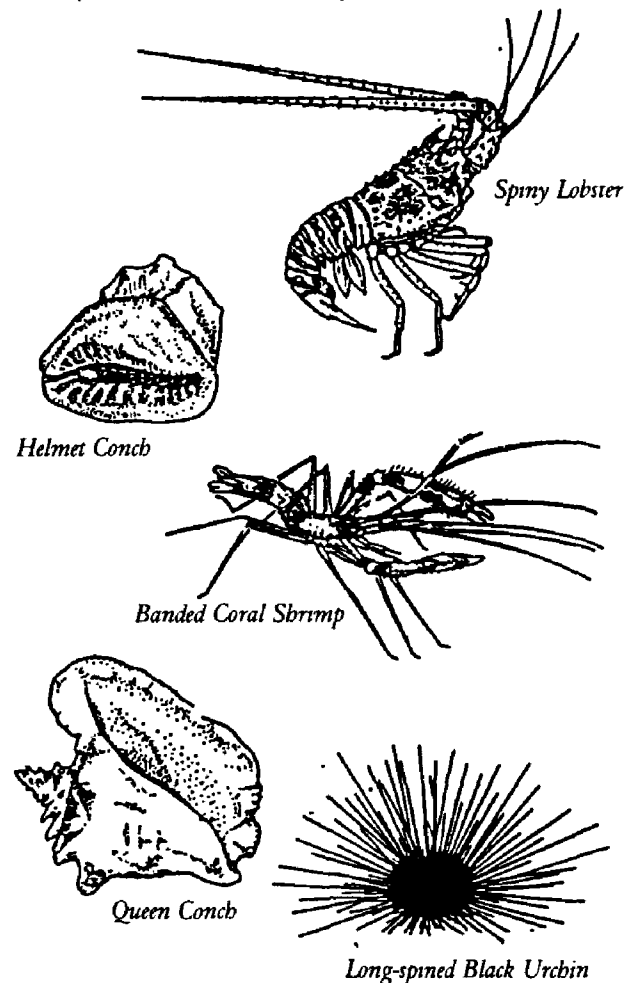


- Deforestation, slash and burn agriculture and clean cropping on steep hillsides resulting in severe soil erosion and steadily declining agricultural productivity. Tons of fertile topsoil are periodically washed out to sea, with suspended sediments smothering coral reef communities
- Over-fishing and the nonenforcement of regulations to protect immature stocks threaten near-shore reef fisheries. Particularly damaging is the illegal harvesting of fish and shellfish by use of dynamite and the dispersal of chlorine along reefs
- Destruction of marine nursery areas by the filling of tidal wetlands and mangrove forests due, in some measure, to ignorance as to the ecological value of such areas
- Beach and dune destruction as a result of the illegal extraction of sand exposes interior areas to the ravages of storm surge and coastal flooding.
- Disposal of untreated sewage from cities and towns, as well as from tourist hotels and resort areas threatens public health, is an aesthetic blight, and can ultimately imperil tourism as a viable industry.
- Oil spills associated with the production, refining, and transportation of petroleum and petroleum products poses an ever present risk to marine ecosystems as well as to coastal recreation and tourism.
- Solid waste disposal, generating leachate that degrades groundwater supplies, is a particular problem of the island countries with their limited land area.
- Disposal of garbage and other wastes at sea by merchant vessels and recreational boaters is a recognized regional issue.
- The increasing use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals creates the risk of contaminating soil and water resources, thereby threatening sustainable agricultural production as well as endangering the health of local inhabitants.
- Preemption of beach frontage by hotel and condominium developments, often barring local residents

from traditional fishing beaches, is a recurring issue, particularly in areas experiencing an upsurge in tourism. In addition, such development can result in the aesthetic and environmental degradation of the shoreline.

- As cities spread and urban housing proliferates, new development is often sited in areas that are vulnerable to damage from natural disasters—hurricanes, earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions.

Many of these problems are of a localized nature. Others are beyond the capabilities of any one country to solve. However, all of these problems, including more global issues such as species destruction and the rise in sea levels, could benefit from regional cooperation, specifically through information exchange, technology transfer, and a comparison of solutions pursued by other states in the Region.





# WHAT IS THE CARIBBEAN ACTION PLAN?

**T**he Action Plan represents an expression of goals and a programme agenda, adopted by participating Governments, that is consistent with a growing worldwide concern for the conservation and development of marine and coastal resources. The geographic focus of the Plan is the Wider Caribbean Region.

## *Bounds of the Wider Caribbean Region*

The area of the Wider Caribbean Region was drawn to include all of the insular and coastal states and territories of the Caribbean Sea and the Gulf of Mexico, from the U.S. Gulf coast states and the islands of the Bahamian chain, south to the French Department of Guiana. Here is a vast maritime region, of great strategic importance with respect to the global economy, struggling to achieve its own economic development.

## *Evolution of the Caribbean Action Plan*

The Action Plan for the Caribbean emerged as a result of many years of work by governmental and non-governmental representatives of the Caribbean community, assisted by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

This was a grass roots, regionally initiated process set in motion by a deep concern about the future of social/economic development and resource management in the Region. Its evolution was an exhaustive process involving extensive discussion and consultation

Eventually, differences in viewpoints and political perspectives were overcome in the interests of regional co-operation. At Montego Bay, Jamaica in April, 1981, twenty-two states and territories adopted the Action Plan for the protection and development of the marine and coastal resources of the Wider Caribbean Region

## *In Pursuit of Common Objectives*

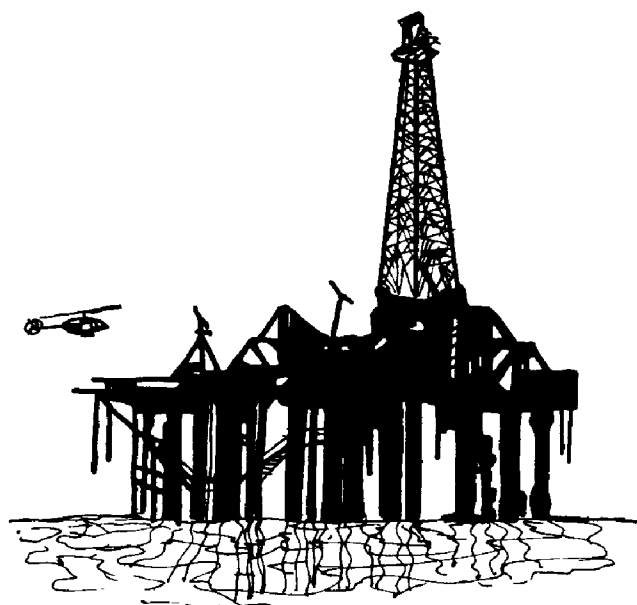
In adopting the Action Plan at the 1981 Montego Bay meeting, the Governments of the Wider Caribbean Region have created a forum for discussion and debate on issues of vital importance to achieving a balance be-

tween economic development and environmental protection. The Action Plan has the unique distinction of being the single instrumentality which officially commits the Governments of this vast and diverse Region to join together in pursuit of common objectives.

The program objectives embraced by the Caribbean Action Plan include the following.

## ■ *Assistance to all Countries of the Region. Recognizing the Special Situation of the Smaller Island Countries.*

The countries and territories of the Wider Caribbean Region vary enormously in their population size and resource base. On the one hand, the larger continental nations—Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico and the United States—have abundant agricultural and mineral resources. Along the Gulf Coast of the U.S., the states of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama are major producers of oil and gas, with large coastal cities, and deep-water industrial ports. Offshore of the Mexican states of Veracruz, Tampico, and Campeche are major oil and gas producing fields, as is the case with the coastal states of Venezuela



In contrast, the Central American republics, and particularly the island nations and territories of the Caribbean, are areas struggling to sustain relatively large populations with very limited natural resources, giving rise to severe economic and social problems. These nations, with few exceptions, have been seriously affected by steeply fluctuating energy costs, and the decline in world commodity prices for many of their major exports such as sugar, bananas, and bauxite. The result has been serious, often desperate problems of inflation, high unemployment, and severe trade imbalance.

For these reasons it is essential that the Action Plan affirmatively link resource management and economic development so that the goal of sustained long-term growth can be realized. Although the Caribbean Action Plan stresses protection of the natural environment as a principal objective, it also embraces the goal of assisting the island nations of the Caribbean in pursuit of programs that result in sustained economic development.

#### ■ *Co-ordination of International Assistance Activities*

A considerable amount of technical assistance is provided to the Caribbean Region by national and international donor agencies, including the European Economic Community, UNDP, PAHO, U.S. AID, OAS and CIDA. Much of this assistance has been for programs that are directly related to improving resource management practices—reforestation, soil conservation, and watershed management.

Over time, the Caribbean Action Plan will link many of these efforts to insure that the lessons learned in any

one nation are shared throughout the Region. All too often, program results, which may have broad application, never circulate beyond a particular sponsoring agency or ministry. By announcing new studies, identifying innovative programs, and arranging meetings of experts, the Caribbean Action Plan could make international assistance funds do double duty, seeing to it that valuable research findings and program results are shared among a wide constituency.

#### ■ *Strengthening Existing National and Subregional Institutions*

A major objective of the Action Plan is to strengthen existing institutions by directing funds and expertise to groups prepared to undertake activities consistent with its program agenda. A good example of such an institution building effort is the support extended to the Caribbean Environmental Health Institute (CEHI).

#### ■ *Technical Co-operation in the Use of the Region's Human, Financial and Natural Resources*

There is a growing, but still inadequate exchange of information and technical expertise among Caribbean nations despite the existence of major university, governmental, and private research centres throughout the Region. The "Directory of Marine Environmental Centres" lists 89 centres in 25 Caribbean countries and territories. Through the process of networking, these centres could strengthen regional capabilities in providing assistance in such fields as agriculture, oceanography, energy, and the entire range of environmental sciences.

