

### Media Release

Nine countries in East Africa stand to reap significant benefits from a partnership agreement that was formally adopted today between the Agulhas and Somali Current Large Marine Ecosystems (ASCLME) Project and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) of the United States.

This agreement formalises and strengthens the already constructive working relationship between the two organisations and lays the groundwork for them to comprehensively improve the collection, interpretation and dissemination of information relating to the understanding of marine and coastal environment of the western Indian Ocean.

This information will, in turn, strengthen the environmental relationship between the nine countries that share the marine resources of the region. The countries are Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania. They are working together through the ASCLME Project to effectively and sustainably manage shared marine resources through an ecosystem-based approach.

“NOAA has a long standing history and commitment to the development and advancement of Large Marine Ecosystem projects globally,” explains Dr David Vousden, Director of the ASCLME Project which is holding its annual steering committee meeting outside Dar es Salaam this week.

“The partnership agreement will lead to enhanced cooperation between the two organisations, resulting in the realisation of a number of shared objectives.”

Among others, these objectives include:

- The collection of information to facilitate the monitoring of climate change and ecosystem variability.
- The development of an early warning system to alert countries of the region to the impacts of climate change.
- The coordination and development of transboundary fisheries management strategies.
- The development of management plans for fisheries that are thought to be particularly sensitive to the impacts of climate change.

Science and technology training of research staff at local institutions is a priority of the partnership agreement.

Dr Steven Murawski, Director of Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor for NOAA Fisheries Service, is pleased about the growing relationship between NOAA and the ASCLME Project, and noted that:

“NOAA is excited to be working in partnership with the ASCLME Project to enable the advancement of environmental management goals of the region and its countries,” said Dr Murawski.

“The Agulhas and Somali currents have a major influence on the marine ecosystem and resources of the Western Indian Ocean and as such the people and economies of the region who rely on those resources and services. It is apparent that there are gaps in understanding of many elements of the ecosystem, including fisheries dynamics and population assessment, the oceanographic and ecosystem processes that drive these

dynamics, biodiversity and other components of the ASCLME system, including socio-economic factors. We look forward to working with the ASCLME project to fill those gaps.”

The ASCLME Project is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Over the past three years, the Project has succeeded in building valuable partnerships with a range of international organisations with a view to meeting its objective of strengthening marine and coastal resource management in the western Indian Ocean region. Partnerships have been forged with NOAA, the African Coelacanth Ecosystem Programme (ACEP), the Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA), the French research agency, IRD, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research.

The ASCLME Project’s steering committee meeting and that of its sister project, the South West Indian Ocean Fisheries Project (SWIOFP), are being hosted by the National Environment Management Council of Tanzania at the Kunduchi Beach Hotel, near Dar es Salaam, from 13 to 17 September.

“We are grateful to the Tanzanian Government for hosting this significant meeting and we look forward to working closely with our many partners, both regional and international,” said Dr Vousden.

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For further information visit [www.asclme.org](http://www.asclme.org) or contact:

Dr David Vousden (Director: ASCLME Project)  
[David.vousden@asclme.org](mailto:David.vousden@asclme.org)  
Tel: +27 790386802

Rebecca Shuford (Fishery Biologist: NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology)  
[Rebecca.Shuford@noaa.gov](mailto:Rebecca.Shuford@noaa.gov)  
Tel: +1 301-713-2363