

THE SHANGHAI DECLARATION

Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas

EMECS 8

October 30, 2008

Staying the Course in Troubled Waters

We are more than 450 persons who participated in the 8th International Conference on Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas in Shanghai, China, under the theme of “Harmonizing River Catchment and Estuary.” We are researchers, policy makers, educators, students, businesspersons, governmental officials, and members of non-governmental organizations. We have come from our workplaces, academic institutions, schools, and homes in China and 36 other countries near and far. We are here because we have a shared interest in a sustainable future for coastal seas around the world. This is our conference declaration.

We applaud the fact that restoration, conservation, and management programs are underway on most of the world’s coastal seas. We have learned that many have been in place long enough to demonstrate some successes, among them reduction of the oxygen-depleted dead zone in the Black Sea, nutrient pollutant reduction in the Delaware Estuary, and increased public awareness as a result of environmental education for school children and citizens in every country represented at EMECS 8. We are delighted with the increasing levels of commitment and intergovernmental cooperation that our leaders have shown in addressing such critically important environmental matters.

Nevertheless, we recognize that we are navigating seriously troubled waters today. The recent economic growth that is so beautifully reflected in the gleaming new buildings of Shanghai gives us hope in our ability to accomplish great things. But we have seen in the past how economic development can neglect environmental concerns because they are viewed as being inconsequential to a country’s well-being. In stark contrast is the world-wide economic turmoil within which EMECS 8 has taken place. This, too, draws attention away from environmental quality as governments search for immediate solutions to their economic problems. The consequences of both economic condition can be serious for our coastal seas: decreasing water quality, loss of resource productivity, and even complete ecosystem disruption.

We simply must not allow governments to neglect our coastal seas regardless of their economic condition. To do so would not only erase the successes many of us have worked so hard to achieve, but also threaten the environmental services that our coastal seas provide which are the foundation of the well-being and prosperity of coastal communities. Further, we have learned through experience that restoration of degraded coastal seas is far more expensive than the cost of implementing programs to prevent that degradation in the first place. Finally, coastal seas, like other ecosystems, are dynamic and changing. These changes have ecological, social, and political aspects, all of which are increasing in rapidity. They require monitoring and adaptive management programs that are only possible through continued vigilance. Global warming is an extreme aspect of this last concern. If effective responses are not implemented, global warming and its consequent effect on sea-level rise could subject our coastal seas to irreversible change with serious worldwide consequences.

We believe that advocacy for our coastal seas, no matter how vigorous and no matter how strongly supported by scientific research, cannot be assumed to compete successfully with perceived economic concerns for the attention and action of our political leaders. We must convince those leaders that healthy, productive, and sustainable coastal waters are vital to a country's economic well-being. We therefore encourage understanding and adoption of a perspective that correctly includes people as an integral part of the system of coastal sea after coastal sea around the world, in every country and within every political context. We identify the elements of this perspective as follows:

1. Coastal seas and their river catchments must be understood to be components of a single system so that harmonization between them from both environmental and policy making perspectives will benefit the entire system.
2. Similarly, the economics, cultural, and creative activities of coastal communities must be understood and harmonized as integral components of that same coastal system.
3. Consequently, degradation of any component of a coastal system has negative effects on all other components; activities that improve the condition of any component will improve the system as a whole.

Past EMECS conference declarations introduced the term “working landscape” to indicate the relationship between land, water, and human activity that generates sustainable economic return through activities such as fishing, farming, commerce, and recreation that can be passed as an economic and environmental asset from generation to generation. At EMECS 8 we learned an informative new concept, sato-umi, which signifies “high productivity and biodiversity of a coastal sea as a result of, and in harmony with, human activity.” Both of these concepts speak to the economic value of a positive relationship between coastal communities and coastal seas. We understand that relationship to our potential benefit; we neglect it to our peril.

Sato-umi places increased emphasis on promoting positive interaction between humankind and our enclosed coastal seas. That interaction can take many forms. It may be realized through concerted, continuous environmental conservation programs. Sustainable economic return through ecosystem-based resource management and agricultural practices are other aspects of sato-umi. So are activities that bring people in contact with coastal systems through recreation and artistic creativity. Especially during these times of rapid economic and environmental change, governments, businesses, and philanthropic organizations alike need to invest significant financial and intellectual resources in programs that will have positive results according to sato-umi – projects that empower local communities to undertake activities to improve water quality and manage living resources with demonstrated success that will be sustainable into the future. Finally, sato-umi places a high premium on an education that connects young people with the natural world and provides them opportunity to learn through hands-on experiences how their sincere concern for the natural world relates to the well-being of their community, family, and themselves. We hear their collective voice in the EMECS 8 Student Declaration. We strongly endorse what they have written. We promise that they will not be disappointed with our response.

Our EMECS 8 Conference Declaration is simple: We must act on the principle that land, water, and people are integral components of the world's coastal seas. Economy and environment are intertwined with art and nature. All are bound together by education. This is the lesson of sato-umi. This will help us keep our course on today's troubled waters. This is what we wish to pass to the next and future generations. This is our commitment. This is our promise.