

# **BANGKOK DECLARATION**

## **Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas**

### **EMECS 2003**



*November 21, 2003*

During November 18 through November 21, 2003, more than 600 delegates from 23 countries convened in Bangkok, Thailand, to participate in the 6th International Conference on the Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas, EMECS 2003. Previous EMECS conferences witnessed an expansion of thinking from a focus on enclosed coastal seas themselves to consideration of whole coastal systems, moving from tidal waters to tributaries to entire watersheds. In Bangkok we have further expanded our focus to include communities and people as natural and significant components of coastal ecosystems under the conference theme, “Comprehensive and Responsible Coastal Zone Management for Sustainable and Friendly Coexistence between Nature and People.”

Scientific research has provided us with significant advances in our understanding of the causes of the degradation of water quality and loss of habitat on the world’s coastal ecosystems. Research is the cornerstone of the most effective environmental policy possible and the implementation of its findings remain critical to progress. Advances in technology have been especially helpful in the continued reduction and control of pollution from point sources. These advances include reduced nutrient loads as a result of wastewater treatment plants upgrades and reduction of emissions from industrial discharges. We also applaud resource management and conservation efforts that have enabled us to restore some of our coastal fisheries and to begin managing these in a sustainable manner.

Even so, there is growing perception and public concern that our coastal seas are responding only very slowly to these demonstrated successes. It is becoming very clear that continued progress will depend on making significant and heretofore unprecedented advances in solving the poorly-addressed problem of pollution from non-point sources. Unlike point sources that are being addressed through changes in technology, control of non-point sources will depend on changes in human behavior. Such changes include the following:

- Development of coastal cities, towns, and villages in a manner that minimizes negative consequences for the environment, including poorly controlled storm water discharge, runoff from impervious surfaces, and coastal erosion of unprotected shorelines;
- Preservation of “working landscapes” (productive landscapes of farms and forests, productive seascapes of fisheries, commerce, and recreation, all of which reflect a historical and continuing coexistence between nature and people) to ensure a diversity of coastal habitats sustained by vital, resource-based coastal economies;
- Decrease in atmospheric deposition of pollutants produced by emissions from transportation and power plants that currently support an inefficient consumption of energy.

The continued degradation of the world’s enclosed coastal seas and loss of their living resources poses a direct threat to the future of the world’s coastal communities, their economics, and the heritage, culture, and natural beauty that contribute to their unique sense of place. We are concerned that a loss of place will contribute to a loss of identity, to a feeling of not being at home anywhere, and to an inability to recognize the value of cultural diversity in a world that desperately needs the cooperation between nations to solve global problems.

In previous EMECS declarations we have affirmed our belief in the importance of collaboration between citizens, NGO’s, scientists, educators, policy makers, and governmental officials for more effective coastal seas’ governance. We find that collaboration alone is no longer sufficient. What is needed is far more active participation. In particular, we believe that such participation must include coastal communities and their citizens more than ever before. We strongly believe that more effective environmental education will be critical to effecting that participation.

We, the participants of the 6th International Conference for Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas, endorse the following principles as policy guidelines for more “Comprehensive and Responsible Coastal Zone Management for Sustainable and Friendly Coexistence between Nature and People”:

1. *There is no contradiction between sustained environmental management, economically viable “working landscapes, and a strong sense of place on the watersheds of the world’s coastal seas. Quality of water and quality of life are intimately related. Local communities, through their local leaders, must play a more active role in promoting responsible behavior by their citizens that will sustain their future economically, culturally, and environmentally.*
2. *Truly integrated coastal zone management policy considers people as a natural component of coastal ecosystems. Such policies must include the sustainability and vitality of coastal communities and their “working landscapes” as a critical goal and promote the full participation of those communities in achieving this goal.*
3. *Environmental education, both formally through the schools and informally through special centers for young people and programs for adults, is of critical importance. In particular, we must counter a growing trend where children have fewer and fewer opportunities to experience the natural environment with all their senses and where their limited exposure comes from a perspective of fear about pollution or global environmental harm. We need more opportunities for hands-on learning based on local examples where children’s involvement can make a difference. We need environmental education programs that view people as a part of nature rather than as intruders. We need to convey to our children a lost sense of wonder about sea and river, forest and field, heritage and home.*
4. *Science functions as more than a source of new information. The discovery of new knowledge and technologies is of little value if not applied to help mankind. Science must also include the interpretation of that knowledge for educators, community leaders, and policy makers alike so their respective activities are based on authentic data rather than points of view.*
5. *Government is both facilitator and regulator. Regulations alone have not resolved the world’s coastal seas’ problems. Policies need to be implemented in ways that support research, encourage data interpretation, and advance formal and informal environmental education. The ultimate goal is nothing less than to help communities help themselves sustain their economic base and sense of place through active participation as essential partners in coastal zone management. International agencies can play a more effective facilitation role through their unique ability to work beyond traditional jurisdictional boundaries, promoting cooperation between nations and also implementing programs based on complete watershed and other natural ecological systems.*
6. *The writer, the columnist, and the poet are the implements of sustainable development of our enclosed coastal seas. We believe no other group has proven as effective in making sense of place a credible and effective factor for sustainable environmental policy.*



This conference established the EMECS Schools and Students Partnership as a new forum to allow young people and their teachers to participate directly in environmental management of enclosed coastal seas. This Conference Declaration incorporates wisdom as seen through their eyes. We mistakenly assume that our policies are attempts to guarantee a high quality of life for the next generation. A better perspective is to realize that we have in fact borrowed the future from our children. We wish to return it a condition that will sustain a high quality of life forever. They are counting on us. They are eager to help. Hand in hand, we will succeed.