Abidjan Convention: Experts finalize key protocols

Experts from the countries of Africa's Atlantic seaboard on Wednesday agreed on three additional draft protocols to the Abidjan Convention, paving the way for their examination and approval by ministers from the Convention's States Parties at their meeting on Thursday and Friday.

They also agreed to amendments to the Abidjan Convention [full name: Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West, Central and Southern Africa region] signed in 1981, ratified in 1984 and amended once since then.

Along with the original 1981 convention, the States Parties had signed on to a Protocol Concerning Cooperation in Combating Pollution in Cases of Emergency, which is now being complemented by the three draft protocols approved at the Expert Meeting. These protocols regard: integrated coastal zone management; environmental norms and standards for oil and gas exploration; and mining in the Convention zone and integrated management of mangrove resources.

Once approved by the Ministers, the amended Convention, additional protocols and a series of other decisions fine-tuned at the Experts Meeting, would need to be ratified at a meeting of plenipotentiaries, whose date is yet to be determined.

The amendment of the text of the Abidjan Convention as well as the new draft protocols address a need to be in line with new realities with regard to the protection, management and sustainable development of marine and coastal areas.

The new draft Convention includes many aspects that were not taken into account in the 1981 text, such as areas beyond national jurisdictions and major UN, international and regional accords regarding the environment and climate change. Other new areas include ocean energy, coastal cities, the Blue Economy and the nexus between environmental protection and management and the livelihoods of coastal communities.

The over 20 decisions approved at the 27-29 March Experts Segment of the 12th Conference of Parties, including the amended draft convention and the protocols, are the result of a process begun in March 2014. That was when the 11th Conference of Parties issued a series of decisions to be followed by the Bureau - a committee that runs the day-to-day affairs of the Convention between Conferences of Parties - along with the Abidjan Convention Secretariat, assisted by a Scientific and Technical Committee.

The results of their work were presented to experts and stakeholders in the various Convention countries at national consultations held last year. Recommendations from these consultations were incorporated in the drafts, which were then fine-tuned by the experts at their Monday-Friday meeting this week.
Press release

Specialists from Asia, Africa, the Americas, Europe and Oceania provided useful insights into various aspects of integrated ocean management policies, the theme of the conference.