

OUR COASTAL FUTURES

A Strategy for the Sustainable Development of the World's Coasts



futureearth coasts 

www.futureearthcoasts.org

Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada. Photo by Don Forbes

“Coastal zones are the frontline in our global quest for a sustainable future.”

Vladimir Ryabinin, Executive Secretary, Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO

The Opportunity

Improving the management of our coasts will help the world create new pathways towards a more sustainable future. Most of the world’s sustainability opportunities and challenges converge in the coastal zone – the interface between land and sea. Here, hundreds of millions of people already face increasing pressure from population growth, unsustainable development, and escalating disaster risk as the climate changes and sea levels rise. This “OUR COASTAL FUTURES” strategy will help us to work together to unlock regionally appropriate opportunities for the sustainable development of our shared coastal zones.



Balneário Camboriú, Brazil. Photo by Bruce Glavovic



Future Earth Coasts has developed **OUR COASTAL FUTURES** as a new regional approach to:

- A. Enable regional stakeholders and institutions to develop a common understanding of their coasts and future prospects;**

- B. Co-design robust strategies to chart desired coastal futures;**

- C. Co-produce innovative coastal sustainability initiatives and pathways to achieve these desired outcomes, and realise the Sustainable Development Goals.**

This new approach brings together those working towards coastal sustainability in regions as diverse as the Arctic, East Africa and the Caribbean. To facilitate a global transition to coastal sustainability, the **OUR COASTAL FUTURES** initiative needs to be embedded in legitimate institutional arrangements at the appropriate regional scale, such as the Arctic Council or the governing bodies of Regional Seas programmes. This strategy complements and helps to integrate many essential initiatives that extend from the local to global levels.

What is 'Future Earth Coasts'?

Future Earth Coasts is a global research project of **Future Earth**, a platform for translating sustainability knowledge into action that includes a number of United Nations agencies, intergovernmental bodies and organizations such as the International Council for Science.

Future Earth Coasts is a global network of coastal scientists and practitioners from all disciplines of the natural and social sciences, engineering, law and the humanities, who are dedicated to the sustainable development of our coastal zones.



Future Earth Coasts provides access to a continuously growing network of coastal researchers, and their connections with a diversity of coastal stakeholders worldwide.

Through the **OUR COASTAL FUTURES** initiative, **Future Earth Coasts** provides an independent forum for regional coastal stakeholders to transform the way they manage their coasts to meet the Sustainable Development Goals. This is achieved through co-design and co-production, involving credible coastal scientists, local and indigenous knowledge-holders, and representatives from the private sector, media, non-government and government organisations, with the support of the international donor and development community.

The benefits of OUR COASTAL FUTURES



Over time, it enables regional coastal stakeholders and governing institutions to chart a course away from unsustainable practices towards desired sustainable coastal futures.



It provides access to Future Earth Coasts' global network of scientific expertise, portfolio of best practices, and the resources needed to improve management of our shared coastal zones.



It offers an independent forum that can be tailor-made for each region, given existing realities and institutional arrangements.



It builds on and integrates scientific, local and indigenous knowledge.



It builds shared understanding about coastal issues, problems, opportunities and potential pathways to sustainability.



It considers alternative coastal futures and then develops strategies that can be implemented sequentially, reviewed, and modified over time.



It helps to build the capability of the people and institutions that guide how we use coastal resources and sustain our coasts.



Wai Tan, Shanghai, China. Copyright, Li Yang, www.eyepetizer.net

OUR COASTAL FUTURES:

A Four-Step Approach

While every initiative will be driven by different regional needs, each will be a tailor-made cyclical process that follows 4 distinct steps:



Step 1: Bring regional coastal stakeholders together to agree on a way forward

- Regional stakeholders are consulted, and the need for the Our Coastal Futures initiative independently assessed
- With a mandate to take action secured, Future Earth Coasts seeks initial funding
- Facilitated by Future Earth Coasts, regional coastal stakeholders and governing institutions agree on how they will work together, and develop a detailed work programme
- Establish a Regional Coastal Futures Forum or similar representative body



Step 2: Build shared understanding about the coast and identify plausible coastal futures

- Future Earth Coasts coordinates preparation of a regional State of the Coast report, building on available science, and local and indigenous knowledge
- Future Earth Coasts coordinates preparation of a regional Coastal Futures Report that maps out plausible coastal scenarios, given coastal limits and opportunities
- Future Earth Coasts helps to inform and educate interested parties, and creates opportunities for active involvement



Step 3: Co-design robust coastal sustainability strategies

- Facilitated by Future Earth Coasts, regional stakeholders and governing authorities identify priority sustainability issues, gaps, thresholds, barriers and enablers to transition from the status quo to a desired coastal future
- Regional stakeholders and governing authorities identify, compare and select promising coastal sustainability interventions for short-term action; and promising pathways in the medium- to long-term
- Regional stakeholders and governing authorities, facilitated by Future Earth Coasts, prepare a framework Agreement to improve regional coastal sustainability prospects



Step 4: Co-produce innovative coastal sustainability interventions and enable transition pathways

- Legitimate regional institutions implement the ratified framework Agreement based on agreed roles and responsibilities, and priority interventions
- Future Earth Coasts helps to independently monitor and evaluate coastal sustainability interventions in the short to medium-term
- Coastal stakeholders and governing authorities review and revise the framework Agreement over time, charting new pathways in the light of new understanding and changing circumstances in the medium to long-term
- Future Earth Coasts can contribute to ongoing capability building efforts to enable coastal stakeholders and governing institutions to chart transformative coastal sustainability pathways

OUR COASTAL FUTURES brings science, policy and practice together to translate knowledge into action in a step-wise manner. It builds on and goes beyond coastal and ocean assessments that focus on understanding the current state of the environment and emerging trends.

OUR COASTAL FUTURES is an independent forum, facilitated by Future Earth Coasts, to enable regional collaboration, develop shared understanding, mobilise action, and build capability. Regional coastal stakeholders and their governing institutions are responsible for making decisions and coastal sustainability interventions.

Our Experience Around the World

Future Earth Coasts builds on over 20 years of global scientific experience and applied research through the Land-Ocean Interactions in the Coastal Zone (LOICZ) project of the former International Geosphere Biosphere Programme and the International Human Dimensions Programme. Relevant experience is illustrated below:

Advancing coastal knowledge and understanding: LOICZ and more recently Future Earth Coasts have made extensive contributions to scientific understanding and applied research, for instance through books such as 'The Treatise on Estuarine and Coastal Science', 'Megacities and the Coast' and 'Coastal Fluxes in the Anthropocene', that apply interdisciplinary science to advance coastal sustainability (<https://www.futureearthcoasts.org/books/>).

The State of the Arctic Coast Report (2011): This report highlights the sensitivity of the Arctic coast, trends and evolving impacts, and the need for a more holistic understanding of the interplay between humanity and the rapidly changing Arctic coastal environment (<https://www.futureearthcoasts.org/state-of-the-arctic-coast-2010-scientific-review-and-outlook/>).

Circum-Arctic Coastal Communities Knowledge Network (CACCON): Future Earth Coasts contributes to this pan-Arctic network of local communities and knowledge hubs, in partnership with many other initiatives, to share knowledge, build consensus, and embark on transformative sustainability pathways (<https://www.caccon.org/>).

Ocean Acidification in Africa: Future Earth Coasts enables a pan-African network for action to monitor, minimize and address the system-wide impacts caused by ocean acidification whilst building capacity in the next generation of African ocean scientists (<http://www.oa-africa.net>).

Understanding coastal vulnerability around the world: Future Earth Coasts designed and led a valorization workshop, with a broad range of stakeholders, to assess effective methods for co-designing and co-implementing transformative science projects to understand and reduce coastal vulnerability (<https://www.futureearthcoasts.org/belmont-forum-synthesis-meeting-10-12-december-2016-san-francisco/>).

This legacy is the foundation for the **OUR COASTAL FUTURES** initiative.



Tarawa, Kiribati. Photo by Don Forbes

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