

On this page: [Roots](#) | [WRI and the Exploratory Steering Committee](#) | [Transition Phase and Launch](#) | [Assessment Work and Release of Findings](#)

## Roots



### Millennium Ecosystem Assessment

The history of the MA can be traced to demands from both scientists and policymakers. By the mid-1990s, many individuals involved in the work of international conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) realized that the extensive needs for scientific assessments within the conventions were not being met through the mechanisms then in place. In contrast, effective assessment process like the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) did exist for such treaties as the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Scientists had also identified a need for an international ecosystem assessment. Although major advances had been made in ecological sciences, resource economics and other fields during the 1980s and 1990s, these new findings appeared to be poorly reflected in policy discussions concerning ecosystems. Recognizing these shortcomings, a panel of 40 leading scientists prepared a draft international assessment - "Protecting our Planet, Securing our Future: Linkages Among Global Environmental Issues and Human Needs". The study, published in November 1998 by UNEP, NASA, and the World Bank, called for "a more integrative assessment process for selected scientific issues, a process that can highlight the linkages between questions relevant to climate, biodiversity, desertification, and forest issues."

### WRI and the Exploratory Steering Committee

The specific proposal for the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment arose during a brainstorming meeting held at World Resources Institute on May 17, 1998 to discuss plans for the biennial World Resources Report, published by WRI, UNEP, World Bank, and UNDP. Building on a proposal by Dr. Walter Reid (WRI Vice President through July 1998), the meeting concluded with a proposal to undertake a set of activities to create a new international assessment process. These activities included: a) conducting a “Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems” (PAGE), b) focusing World Resources 2000-2001 on the condition of global ecosystems; and c) establishing a consultative process that could lead to the creation of a full international science assessment. The four partners (WRI, UNEP, the World Bank, and UNDP) approved that proposal and the exploratory phase began later that month. The process unfolded as follows:

#### **June 1998**

- Avina Group, a private philanthropic foundation, agrees to provide a grant to WRI to begin to implement the strategy developed by WRI, UNEP, UNDP and the World Bank.
- WRI initiates work on the Pilot Analysis of Global Ecosystems under the direction of Dan Tunstall and Norbert Henninger.

#### **October 1998**

- WRI, UNEP, UNDP, and the World Bank, invite 30 representatives from the scientific community, UN Agencies, the private sector and international conventions to an informal meeting on October 23-24, 1998 to explore the merits of establishing the MA. The group recommends the establishment of a formal steering committee; WRI is asked to serve as the Secretariat for the Exploratory Steering Committee; Walt Reid is asked to coordinate the work of the Steering Committee.

#### **February 1999**

- First meeting of the MA Exploratory Steering Committee. The Committee will explore: a) whether demand exists for the MA; b) what institutional arrangements and authorization will be needed for it to succeed; and, c) whether it could be financed. The meeting is followed by extensive consultations with international conventions, the scientific community and donors as well as workshops in Malaysia (chaired by A.H. Zakri) and Canada (chaired by Madhav Gadgil). Meridian Institute becomes involved to help design the multi-stakeholder process for the MA.

- The United Nations Foundation, the Packard Foundation, and the Global Environment Facility provide grants in support of the Exploratory Steering Committee, PAGE, and WRR.

### **October 1999**

- Second meeting of the Exploratory Steering Committee. The Steering Committee passes a resolution calling for the creation of the MA on behalf of their institutions (including four UN Agencies, International Council for Science, CGIAR, World Bank, World Resources Institute, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and World Conservation Union).

### **Transition phase and launch**

Following its October 1999 meeting, the Exploratory Steering Committee initiated a “transition phase” designed to establish the formal governance and institutional arrangements for the MA. Between October 1999 and April 2000, the Steering Committee selected the institutions to be formally represented on the Board and 15 “at large” board members (leaving 15 additional Board seats to be filled by the new Board once it was established), finalized the basic organizational and financial arrangements for the MA, and reviewed and approved the formal MA proposal that was subsequently submitted to the GEF, UN Foundation and other donors. WRI agreed to serve as the interim secretariat for as long as was needed in order to ensure the effective launch of the process.

Between October 1999 and July 2000, the Conference of Parties of the CBD and CCD formally endorsed the MA as a mechanism to meet some of their assessment needs and a similar endorsement was provided by the Standing Committee of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar). Other events during this time period included:

### **April 2000**

- A proposed “International Program on Ecosystem Change (IPEC)—aimed at stimulating research and outreach related to “ecological forecasting”—is merged with the MA. IPEC, an elaboration of an idea proposed by Gretchen Daily and several other leading ecologists in July 1998, was formally accepted as a project of SCOPE (the Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment) and this same activity was approved as the “Scenario” Working Group of the MA in July.
- The Executive Summary of World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: The

Fraying Web of Life is released, calling for the creation of the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment. The international newsmagazine TIME features the findings of WRR2000 in its international Earth Day Special Issue.

- United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan features the MA as one of five major initiatives for “Sustaining our Future” in his Millennium Report to the United Nations General Assembly.

### **May 2000**

- Summit Foundation and Wallace Global Foundation provide grants helping to maintain and enhance the ‘transition phase’ activities (since none of the grants obtained for the full project are available until the full MA budget is secured).
- The Global Environment Facility approves a \$7 million grant to the MA.

### **July 2000**

- The United Nations Foundation approves a \$4 million grant in support of the MA.
- With financial support from the Government of Norway, the first meeting of the MA Board is held in Trondheim, Norway. Dr. Robert Watson and Dr. A.H. Zakri are elected as Board Co-Chairs, and Dr. Walter Reid is invited to continue to serve as the Acting Director.

### **September 2000**

- The Government of Norway and Rockefeller Foundation provide support for the further exploration of possible “sub-global assessments” to be included as components of the MA.
- Release of World Resources 2000-2001: People and Ecosystems: The Fraying Web of Life calling for the establishment of the MA.
- Over the next six months, five separate PAGE studies—Agroecosystems, Forests, Grasslands, Freshwater, and Coastal Ecosystems—are released.

### **October 2000**

- The World Bank approves the first year of a \$2 million four-year grant to the MA.
- UNEP agrees to provide \$200,000 per year in support of the MA.

### **December 2000**

- The Packard Foundation approves a \$2.4 million grant to WRI in support of the MA, placing the total funding committed to the process at over 75% of the full budget, thereby triggering the release of several other grants and enabling the process to be initiated.
- Dr. Harold Mooney and Ms. Angela Cropper are invited to serve as the Co-Chairs of the Assessment Panel.

### **February 2001**

- Initial planning meetings are held for sub-global assessments in Southeast Asia, Southern Africa, and Europe.
- Assessment Panel members appointed.
- Millennium Ecosystem Assessment begins.

### June 5, 2001

- Formal public launch of the MA. Events take place in New York, Torino Italy, and Tokyo.

## Assessment Work and release of findings

### Working meetings during 2001

- **February**: South Africa Regional Assessment Planning Meeting Pretoria, South Africa.
- **February**: Southeast Asia Regional Assessment Planning Meeting Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- **March**: Northern/Central Europe Regional Assessment Planning Meeting Potsdam, Germany.
- **April**: First MA Technical Design Meeting Bilthoven, Holland (RIVM)
- **October**: Second MA Technical Design Meeting Cape Town, South Africa.

### Working meetings during 2002

- **January**: Second MA Board Meeting Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **March**: Conceptual Framework CLA and Core Datasets & Indicators Meeting Paris, France.
- **April**: 1st Scenarios WG Workshop Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.
- **April**: Scenarios Workshop - Caribbean Marine Environment, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago.
- **April**: Conceptual Tools for Developing Biodiversity Scenarios Workshop Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago.
- **April**: Condition WG Meeting #1 Frascati, Italy (FAO).
- **May**: Data and Indicators Workshop Rome, Italy (FAO).
- **May**: SE Asia MA Planning Meeting Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **May**: SAfMA Workshop on Trial Assessments and WSSD Preparation Luiperdskloof, South Africa (CSIR).
- **May**: Responses Working Group Meeting 1 New Delhi, India.
- **June**: 1st Sub-Global Working Group meeting Gamboa, Panama (STRI).
- **August**: Conceptual Framework #2 Frankfurt, Germany (Min of Environment).
- **August**: Assessment Panel Meeting Frankfurt, Germany (Min. of Environment).
- **October**: Scenarios Working Group #2 Bangkok, Thailand (TDRI).

- **November:** Scenarios South Africa Workshop, South Africa.
- **November:** Condition Working Group #2 Sao Carlos, Brazil (U. Sao Carlos).
- **December:** Drivers Cross cut Special Working Group Meeting San Francisco, California, USA.
- **December:** Assessment Panel #7 San Francisco San Francisco, United States.
- **December:** Conceptual Framework #3 San Francisco, USA.

### Working meetings during 2003

- **January:** Health & Well-being Cross-cut Manila, Philippines (WHO).
- **February:** Board #3 and Assessment Panel #8 Geneva, Switzerland (IUCN-WHO).
- **February:** Biodiversity Cross-cut Gland, Switzerland (IUCN/Ramsar Headquarters).
- **March:** Scenarios Working Group #3 San Jose, Costa Rica (INBio).
- **April:** Scenarios Civil Society Workshop New Haven, CT, USA (Yale University).
- **April:** Sub-Global Scenarios Training Workshop Penang, Malaysia (World Fish Center).
- **April:** Marine-Coastal Cross-cut meeting Vancouver, B.C., Canada (Fisheries Institute-UBC).
- **April:** Condition Working Group #3 Washington DC, USA (WRI).
- **May:** Food and Cultivated Systems Cross Cut Washington DC, USA (IFPRI).
- **May:** Responses Working Group # 2 Frankfurt, Germany (German Ministry of Environment).
- **June:** Sub-Global Working Group #2 Stockholm, Sweden (CNM, Stockholm University).
- **August:** Drylands Cross-cut Tashkent, Uzbekistan (ICARDA/UNU).
- **October:** Assessment Panel Meeting #8 Prague, Czech Republic.
- **October:** Combined Working Groups #1 Prague, Czech Republic (Charles University, Environment Center).

### Working meetings during 2004

- **March:** Board Meeting Nairobi, Kenya (UNEP).
- **March:** Bridging Scales & Epistemologies Conference Alexandria, Egypt (Bibliotheca Alexandrina).
- **March:** Sub-Global Assessments Working Group Meeting, #3 Alexandria, Egypt (Bibliotheca Alexandrina).
- **April:** Assessment Panel #9 Montreal, Canada (Government of Canada & CBD).
- **April:** Combined Conditions, Responses & Scenarios WG Meetings Montreal, Canada (Government of Canada & CBD).
- **June:** Full Synthesis Team Meeting #1 Mexico City, Mexico (CONABIO).
- **August:** MA Private Sector Synthesis Team Meeting Portland, USA.
- **August:** Desertification Synthesis Team Meeting Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (United Nations University).
- **August:** Wetlands Synthesis Team Meeting Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia (Aonyx Environmental).
- **September:** Assessment Panel Meeting #10 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- **September:** Combined Working Groups #2 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

- **December:** MA Biodiversity Synthesis Team London, United Kingdom (Zoological Society of London).

### Working meetings during 2005

- **January:** Assessment Panel meets to finalize SDMs Scheveningen, Netherlands (Unilever).
- **January:** Final Sub-Global Assessment Working Group meeting Scheveningen, Netherlands (Unilever).
- **January:** General Synthesis Team Meeting Scheveningen, Netherlands (Unilever).
- **January:** Full Synthesis Team Meeting for Wetlands, CCD, Private Sector and Health Scheveningen, Netherlands (Unilever).
- **January:** MA Board - Summary Report and Post -MA plans Rotterdam, Netherlands (Unilever).
- **March:** Board Technical Meeting - review technical reports and syntheses New York, USA.
- **March:** Final Board Meeting to approve MA reports New York, USA.

### March 30, 2005

- MA findings publicly launched at press conferences and seminars in London, Tokyo, Beijing, Delhi, Cairo, Paris, Nairobi, Washington DC, Brasilia, Sao Paulo, Stockholm, Rome and Lisbon.