



COBSEA Secretariat

United Nations Environment Programme

**Report of the
Twentieth Intergovernmental Meeting of the
Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)**





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the Coordinating Body on the Seas
of East Asia (COBSEA)

Ha Long City, Viet Nam
2-5 November 2009

**REPORT OF THE TWENTIETH INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING OF THE
COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA (COBSEA)**

UNEP

Ha Long City, November 2009

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AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING OF THE MEETING

1.1 Welcome address on behalf of Quang Ninh Province, Viet Nam

1. Mr. Do Thong, the Vice-Chairperson of the Provincial People Committee of Quang Ninh Province delivered the welcome address. He warmly welcomed all delegates and participants to Ha Long City, a World Heritage Site and wished everyone a pleasant stay. He noted that the work COBSEA was doing for the conservation of the marine environment is very important for his province, as a large part of Viet Nam's population, including in Quang Ninh Province, lives in the coastal zone and depends on the sea and its marine ecosystems for livelihood and well-being. He wished the meeting productive work and constructive outcomes.

1.2 Remarks by the Chair of the Nineteenth Meeting of COBSEA

2. H.E. Mr. Khong Sam Nuon, Secretary of State, Ministry of Environment of Cambodia in his role as the Chairperson of the 19th Meeting of COBSEA thanked the host country, the other COBSEA member countries and international organizations. He thanked UNEP for posting an experienced Coordinator to COBSEA and noted the need for all countries to support his work. He further noted that COBSEA was at a crossroad and as there was an urgent need to strengthen and revitalize it, only joint efforts and substantial support by both UNEP and the member countries could make it a relevant and effective organization. He thanked the host country for the hospitality and the delegates for their good spirit of cooperation and wished the meeting success in its deliberations.

1.3 Opening remarks on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam

3. Dr. Nguyen Chu Hoi, Deputy Administrator, Vietnam Administration for Seas and Islands (VASI) delivered the opening address on behalf of the Minister of Natural Resources and Environment, and on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam. He welcomed all participants to Ha Long Bay and Ha Long City and noted that the marine and coastal resources were of particular importance to the Vietnamese Government. He envisaged that the outcome of the meeting will not only contribute to sustainable development and livelihood improvement of COBSEA member states but will also address transboundary and climate change issues. He informed the meeting that in view of COBSEA's financial crisis, the Government of Viet Nam was considering increasing the contribution to the Trust Fund and hoped that other countries will also do the same.

1.4 Opening remarks on behalf of UNEP

4. Dr. Jacqueline Alder, Coordinator of the Marine and Coastal Environment Branch, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) delivered a welcome address on behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner, and the Director of the UNEP/DEPI, Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, and welcomed the participants to the meeting. In her welcome address, she thanked the Government of Viet Nam for hosting this important event. She stated that UNEP had always supported COBSEA as a part of the continuous support to its Regional Seas programme. COBSEA, being at present in a difficult situation will continue to derive benefit through UNEP's programmatic, scientific and substantial support, but that it is only with the full engagement and commitment of countries that it can become a meaningful programme again. She noted that the Regional Seas, including COBSEA will play a major role in the implementation UNEP's new marine strategy which would benefit COBSEA and the region.

1.5 Introduction of participants

5. The participants were invited to briefly introduce themselves to the meeting. The participants included representatives from the COBSEA member countries Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Australia was represented by an official of the Australian Embassy in Hanoi. In addition, representatives from UNEP, Nairobi, UNEP Regional Office for Asia Pacific, UNEP/DGEF, National University of Singapore (NUS), Green Fins Thailand, South China Sea GEF Project, the Tropical Marine Science Institute (Singapore), the UNEP Northwest Pacific Action Plan Regional Coordinating Office (NOWPAP RCU) and the COBSEA Secretariat also attended the meeting.

The list of participants is attached as **Annex I** to this report.

1.6 Presentation of credentials

6. All delegations, except Australia, presented their credentials to the Secretariat. The credentials were reviewed and accepted. Australia noted that due to last minute health reasons the representative of the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and Arts could not attend the meeting and the official credentials were supposed to be presented by her.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

2.1 Designation of officers

7. In accordance with the United Nations Environment Programme Rules of Procedures of the Governing Council, the participants were invited to elect a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and a Rapporteur. The meeting agreed to elect the following officers:

Chairperson:	Dr. Nguyen Chu Hoi, Viet Nam
Vice-Chairperson:	H.E. Mr. Khong Sam Nuon, Cambodia
Rapporteur:	Mr. Eng Tiang Sing, Singapore

2.2 Organization of work

8. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to introduce the working and information documents and to brief the meeting participants regarding the administrative arrangements for conducting the meeting. The Secretariat informed the participants that the meeting would be conducted in plenary. The meeting would be conducted in English.

2.3 Adoption of the meeting agenda

9. After considering the provisional agenda submitted by the Secretariat, the meeting adopted the agenda attached as **Annex II** to this report.

AGENDA ITEM 3: PROGRESS REPORT ON COBSEA'S ACTIVITIES 2008-2009

3.1 Report from the Secretariat

10. Dr. Ellik Adler, COBSEA Coordinator, briefly introduced the UNEP Regional Seas Programme, and their main objectives to serve as a regional platform for coordination of activities that will contribute to sustainable development of the shared marine and coastal environment and also to serve as a platform for regional implementation of global conventions, MEAs and global programmes. He then briefly introduced COBSEA, its history and its mandate.

11. The Coordinator then presented the Secretariat's Progress Report on COBSEA's activities that were carried out during 2008-2009, summarized in Document IGM 20/3. The Progress Report was presented according to the four components of the *New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)*, namely: (i) Information Management; (ii) National Capacity Building; (iii) Strategic and Emerging Issues; and (iv) Regional Cooperation. He gave an overview of the activities that had been undertaken since the 19th IGM of COBSEA, including a report on the implementation of previous IGM decisions, on new activities and activities that have been completed.

12. The Coordinator also presented the Financial Report on the East Asian Seas Trust Fund. He informed the meeting on the diminishing funding from external sources, on the status of countries contributions, on the core expenditures of the Secretariat and on the worrying pace in which the reserves of the Trust Fund are being depleted. He emphasized the fact that if no substantial change will occur in the support given to the Trust Fund, either by UNEP or by increased contributions from the member countries, the Trust Fund will become completely depleted at the beginning of 2011. He urged the delegates to consider an urgent increase of their respective countries' contributions to the Trust Fund.

13. Dr. Young-Woo Park, The UNEP Director of the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) commented on the importance of regional collaboration and emphasized the need for countries commitment and their expressed will to support COBSEA. He mentioned that the main purpose for him to attend the meeting was to take the opportunity to gather feedback from member countries on an individual basis about their position on COBSEA and the support they could provide to it.

14. Mr. Xiaodong Zhong, the representative from NOWPAP, commented about the close collaboration between COBSEA and NOWPAP. He noted that two countries, China and Korea are members to both NOWPAP and COBSEA, a fact that further promotes the "horizontal collaboration" between the two UNEP Regional Seas programmes. He pointed at various activities related to marine litter, coastal cleanup campaigns, marine invasive species and biodiversity management as examples for this fruitful cooperation. Furthermore, there is considerable information sharing between NOWPAP and COBSEA through the websites and other means. He promised that such collaboration will continue to benefit the region and address the concerns of member states.

15. The meeting also discussed the collaboration with other regional organizations aimed at avoiding duplication of activities. The meeting agreed that regional collaboration efforts should continue in order to enhance coordination, information exchange and the effectiveness of the organizations concerned. Strengthened collaboration between COBSEA and other regional organizations and projects will also avoid duplication of work and will assist in a coordinated approach to addressing environmental concerns in the region. Delegates also emphasized the importance of creating partnerships with international organizations and MEAs as possible sources of financial support to COBSEA's activities.

16. Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia clarified their position on the MoU with ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment (AWGCME). Their concern was not because of the usefulness of the MoU but rather from the perspective of the process involved and the legality of AWGCME to sign such an agreement. The meeting agreed on the need to focus on simple, practical and operational collaboration rather than on lengthy legal processes of signing MoUs.

17. Indonesia suggested that the Secretariat explore the development of a format for countries to report to the COBSEA IGM on their respective activities that contribute to COBSEA's overall objective of sustainable and wise management of the marine environment. As there are not many other opportunities for countries to be informed and updated about the on-going and new projects and initiatives in their neighbouring countries, this new format, if used by countries and reported back to the Secretariat, would be of much value.

18. Some countries expressed concern regarding the reported unpaid balance of their contributions to the Trust Fund. The Secretariat responded that the report was based on information received from UNON (United Nations Office in Nairobi) dated 31st August 2009 and that according to UNEP Trust Funds procedure, it is UNON that sends out requests and reminders to countries regarding their contributions and not the COBSEA Secretariat.

19. In response to a question on the increased expenditure of the Trust Fund beyond the approved budget, the Coordinator clarified that it was due to the separation costs of the previous Coordinator and the recruitment of the new Coordinator. Unfortunately, such rare, unexpected and unavoidable situations can happen and he assured the member countries that exceeding of the approved budget will not happen again without the approval of the COBSEA Focal Points. However, this increased cost is clearly indicated and explained in the report.

20. The Chairperson concluded the discussion by noting that the meeting expressed its thanks to the Secretariat for this comprehensive and detailed report and confirmed that the meeting has adopted the Progress report for 2008-2009.

3.2 Green Fins

21. The Chairperson invited Mr. Niphon Phongsuwan, Coral Reef Specialist, Phuket Marine Biological Center, Thailand to present the progress in implementing the Green Fins programme. Mr. Niphon presented the background of the implementation of the Green Fins Programme in 4 countries in Southeast Asia, Thailand (since 2004), Philippines (2004), Indonesia (2007) and Malaysia (since 2008). He then described the various activities carried out by the Green Fins Project such as "adopt a reef", monitoring using Reef Watch method to survey the reefs status, assessment of the quality of the dive operator (to ensure that Green Fins members abide to the "code of conduct", friendly diving/snorkelling, underwater cleanups, mooring buoy programme, minimum discharge and strict "no touch".

22. Mr. Niphon Phongsuwan, also described the production of the educational materials guidelines and booklets such as History of Green Fins, Green Fins code of conduct, Green Fins diving/snorkeling environmentally friendly guidelines, Reef Watch guidelines, Impact of fish feeding, underwater cleanup guidelines, Underwater photography guidelines, Laws and regulations. He also described Green Fins activities to raise conservation awareness and the various seminars and workshops carried out.

23. He described also many other activities carried out by Green Fins at both the national and regional levels, such as campaigning on reducing the use of plastic bags, work with Government bodies and private sectors and improve the Green Fins website.

24. COBSEA Coordinator informed the meeting that COBSEA has supported Green Fins Activities both in Thailand and in the region through a series of small agreements with *Green Fins Association of Thailand* and *Reef World Foundation* and with the Ministries of Environment in Indonesia, Malaysia and with Wildlife In Need Foundation/Ocean Adventure in the Philippines. During 2009, a slightly different approach was adopted by the Secretariat vis-à-vis the Green Fins programme. Instead of the project being a “COBSEA activity” it has become a “COBSEA supported activity”, meaning that most of the actual work is carried out now by the NGOs which are supported through modest financial agreements. He expressed his hope that funds will be available to continue and support this good activity.

25. The meeting welcomed Mr. Niphon's presentation and the results of the various outcomes of Green Fins projects.

AGENDA ITEM 4: ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE UNEP/GEF PROJECT “SOUTH CHINA SEA STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAMME (SAP) IMPLEMENTATION”

26. The Chairperson invited Dr. Vo Si Tuan, Vice Director, Institute of Oceanography, Viet Nam, to present Document IGM/20/4.2 “The results of the UNEP/GEF Project Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” and Document 20/4.1 “The UNEP/GEF South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand Project: Lessons Learnt in Regional Cooperation” on behalf of one of the participating countries.

27. Dr. Tuan presented the main outputs of the project including regional coordination, data and information gathering, technical and scientific publications, innovation and knowledge documents, demonstration sites, and regional training programmes. The main outcomes of the project were in the fields of data and information exchange, regional science for local management at demonstration sites and planning future actions for reversing environmental degradation. Dr. Tuan also presented key successes and challenges of the project, and briefed the lessons learnt in regional cooperation.

28. The meeting has taken note of the reports presented, expressed thanks to Dr. Tuan and its appreciation to the project achievements and to its significant contribution to the region.

29. Dr. Ampai Harakunarak, International Waters Task Manager of UNEP/DGEF/ROAP, presented background information and updates on the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and its Fifth Replenishment, focusing on International Waters (IW) Focal Area Strategy. She described the objectives of the GEF and its operating principles including linkage to conventions; funding for agreed incremental costs; co-financing, cost-effectiveness; country-driven and based on national priorities; stakeholder consultation and participation; and monitoring and evaluation. The GEF-5 replenishment is expected to fund 4 years of GEF operations and activities, July 2010 – June 2014.

30. Dr. Ampai presented the IW focal area, and main principles foundational capacity building, implementation of stress reduction measures based on an agreed SAP; she noted that UNEP/DGEF look forward to working closely with COBSEA and its member countries in developing new GEF-funded projects in the region. UNEP has two basic roles in the GEF: providing support to the GEF core activities, policies and programmes and, assisting countries to access GEF financial resources.

31. Responding to a question regarding the lack of regional agreement to develop a regional legally binding instrument within the planned SAP Implementation project, but rather collaborating in mutually agreed areas, Dr. Ampai informed the meeting that a series of discussions on this particular concern of the countries had been undertaken between the GEF Secretariat and relevant GEF agencies including UNEP and that countries are encouraged to clearly express their concern and interest to the GEF Council to find agreeable solutions.

32. Indonesia requested for more details on co-financing of GEF-funded projects, asking how countries mobilize co-financing. Dr. Ampai explained that variety of financial contributions, in-cash and/or "in-kind", could be mobilized from GEF Agencies, government counterpart resources, and resources from other non-GEF sources that would be managed jointly or in parallel with the GEF allocation. During GEF-4, 1:4 co-financing ratio is the average and 1:1 is minimum benchmark targeted.

33. The Chairperson invited COBSEA Coordinator, to present Document IGM 20/4.3 "Status of the Development of the New UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project ("SAP Implementation"). Dr. Adler explained that following the decision of the 19th IGM, COBSEA Secretariat, in cooperation with UNEP/DGEF has developed a Project Information Format (PIF) which was sent on 11th June 2009 to COBSEA Focal Points for comments. By the end of October 2009, only China and Malaysia have provided their comments. He then briefly introduced the same draft PIF that was sent to countries in June, and explained that the PIF will be amended according to the countries comments and guidance during the 20th IGM. Thereafter, the Secretariat will proceed to engage appropriate consultancy services.

34. China noted that the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) is the important outcome of the project entitled "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand" and that China supports to further implement SAP under the framework of COBSEA. China has also welcomed the GEF, as well as other organizations, to provide financial support to implement the SAP. China further noted that no activities should be undertaken in the disputed area of the South China Sea.

35. China has also recommended that all decisions regarding the implementation of SAP should be made through full and candid consultation and on the basis of consensus by all participating countries. China has further noted that it was necessary to enhance regional cooperation among the member countries within the region of East Asian Seas, but that currently it is far from mature to discuss a legally binding regional cooperation framework. China has submitted comments to the Secretariat on the draft PIF, and would like to see revised PIF with those comments being integrated before it is submitted to GEF.

36. Malaysia requested clarifications regarding the requirement that member countries sign a treaty or convention in order to get GEF funding otherwise it will be a futile exercise since not all member countries are in a position to sign such an instrument.

37. Dr. Jackie Alder of UNEP has noted that in a recent meeting between GEF Secretariat, UNEP and other agencies, it was clarified that the GEF will not insist necessarily on a legal instrument but rather on a staged approach towards the development of an effective regional and cooperative mechanism to implement the SAP and that as the GEF is a "country driven process" countries should make their position clear to the GEF.

38. In a general consensus, countries have expressed their strong support to the further development of the PIF through a process of collaboration and consultations with member states and the GEF and its consequent distribution to countries for endorsement. The PIF would then be submitted to the GEF Secretariat for approval with the support of all COBSEA countries. The meeting has agreed that the COBSEA Secretariat in collaboration with UNEP/DGEF should, pending the availability of human resources, continue the development of the PIF, taking into account countries' comments and concerns.

39. Republic of Korea, Australia and Singapore, although not eligible for GEF financial support expressed their support to the project and their readiness to assist in the process.

40. The meeting has also expressed again (following the same decision by the 19th IGM) its continuous agreement that COBSEA is the suitable body to coordinate and facilitate the execution of the SAP and its strong wish that the project coordinating mechanism will be established within the COBSEA Secretariat.

41. Discussions were also held regarding the following points: (i) Australia, Republic of Korea and Singapore are welcomed to contribute to the project and its various activities as appropriate; (ii) the geographical scope of the project to include all COBSEA countries; (iii) the project will include components and activities that address emerging issues of common regional concern such as marine invasive species, marine litter and coastal erosion.

42. The meeting requested the Secretariat to continue and act, in collaboration with UNEP/DGEF and in close consultations with COBSEA countries, as an interim body that will coordinate the required activities to further develop the project.

AGENDA ITEM 5: SIDA/COBSEA PROJECT "SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE COASTAL ZONE"

43. The Chairperson invited Dr. Adler to present Document IGM 20/5 on the COBSEA/Sida project "Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone – Disaster Prevention and Sustainable Development". The Secretariat informed the meeting that the project was developed by the COBSEA Secretariat as a post-tsunami proposal in 2006 and submitted, to the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) for funding. In early 2009, the COBSEA Secretariat was informed that the proposal had been approved for funding by Sida, that has also requested that the proposal would be revised to integrate the concepts of climate change adaptation, sea-level rise, ecosystem approach and results based management into the project. In addition, Sida recommended that instead of only covering the three COBSEA countries that were hit by the tsunami, all seven COBSEA developing countries will be included in the project.

44. The Coordinator informed the meeting that the project focuses on spatial planning and integrated management in coastal areas, aiming to prevent the impacts from natural disasters, climate change and sea-level rise. The project will be implemented in COBSEA member countries over a period of 3 years for a total budget of 1.1 million USD. The project will consist of three main activities: (i) Development of regional guidelines for spatial planning and setback lines; (ii) Translation and national adaptation of the regional guidelines to seven national languages; (iii) Capacity building in pilot projects on spatial planning.

45. He noted that the project has been recently cleared for signature by the Deputy Executive Director of UNEP and expressed his hope that the actual implementation of the project will begin in early 2010. The meeting was informed that the post of a Project Manager would be advertised soon

and countries were encouraged to disseminate the information to suitable and qualified candidates in their respective countries.

46. Some countries have noted that as they and other organizations have already developed policies and activities related to spatial planning, the Secretariat should be aware of the need to prevent overlaps and duplications. The Secretariat responded that indeed ample consultations with partners and countries will be carried out to ensure that such duplications will not occur. Australia noted that it would support the project, among others by sharing its experience and knowledge in the field.

47. Following the support expressed by countries, the Chairperson summarized that the meeting approves the project to be implemented by the Secretariat and that the meetings requests the Secretariat to report to the next IGM on the progress made.

AGENDA ITEM 6: EAST ASIAN SEAS KNOWLEDGEBASE – REPORT AND WAY FORWARD

48. The Chairperson invited Dr. Durairaju Kumaran Raju, Research Fellow, Tropical Marine Science Institute (TMSI), NUS to present Document IGM 20/6 “The East Asian Seas Knowledgebase – report and the way forward”. Dr. Raju in his presentation explained that Phase – II development was based on recommendations from the first EAS knowledgebase workshop and the inputs from member countries to facilitate user friendly share of information among the coastal communities and the system allows members of national and regional partners to remotely upload the updates through secured gateway and uses Geographic Information System for spatial management purposes. When operational, countries and regional partners will be able to share their data and information through this web portal which is a “one-stop-shop” for the coastal/marine data/information in the EAS region. For remote updating by countries and to implement it countries have to nominate a “Coordinator” and “Reviewer”.

49. Viet Nam wanted to know more details on the data submission roles and it was explained that each country need to nominate national coordinators who will be responsible for data submission and review of data to the Knowledgebase every year. The submission will be through the Microsoft Excel template which is available on the website.

50. Thailand expressed that the role of national coordinators is technically challenging and require training for data conversions and submission of GIS data to the knowledgebase. This can be achieved through technical workshops and training programmes for the coordinators or the technical specialists to carry out the submission.

51. The meeting expressed its appreciation to the work carried out by TMSI and noted the importance and usefulness of such regional Knowledgebase. The meeting has recommended that appropriate links to other relevant databases will be created and that the project needs to be careful not to duplicate activities carried out by other organizations. The meeting has also expressed its hope that appropriate funding will be found to continue the development and maintenance of the Knowledgebase. COBSEA Coordinator noted that Singapore could consider supporting the Knowledgebase activity as its contribution to COBSEA.

**AGENDA ITEM 7: EAST ASIAN SEAS ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK (EASEO):
STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT REPORT**

52. The Chairperson invited Prof. Chou Loke Ming, of the National University of Singapore to present Document IGM 20/7 – the final draft of the “East Asian Seas Environment Outlook (EASEO) “State of the Marine Environment Report for the East Asian Seas”. In his presentation, Professor Chou informed the meeting of the decision of the 19th Meeting of COBSEA on the development of EASEO and the subsequent decision of the new COBSEA Coordinator for a more relevant and useful document for countries in line with other Regional Seas Programme, that being the SOMER.

53. The Coordinator explained that the project which was initiated by the 18th COBSEA IGM, is now coming to an end and that it has a high political and scientific value being in line with the UNEP and UNESCO/IOC “Assessment of Assessments” process and comprises the first regional assessment. Its main objective is to assist in science-based policy and decision-making, by providing a large spectrum of synthesized and interpreted information on the state of the marine and coastal environment in the region. He noted that this high quality report was reviewed by four international experts, and their comments, as well as comments from countries were fully taken on board. He thanked Prof. Chou on behalf of COBSEA for a comprehensive and thorough work and noted the need for COBSEA to repeat the compilation and publication of such “State of the Marine Environment Report” every five years. He noted that once approved by the IGM, the report will be published and distributed widely.

54. The meeting then approved the “State of the Marine Environment Report for the East Asian Seas” and thanked Prof. Chou and his team of regional scientists.

AGENDA ITEM 8: COBSEA’S REGIONAL INITIATIVE ON MARINE INVASIVE SPECIES

55. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present Document IGM 20/8, the draft outline programme for COBSEA’s recommended regional activity to address marine and coastal invasive species. Mr. Vellayutham Pachaimuthu presented an overview of the problem of MIS and the initiative that had been undertaken by the Secretariat. Mr. Vellayutham introduced the various definitions of invasive alien species (MIS), and noted that MIS as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity globally.

56. He mentioned the economic, ecological and health impacts of MIS, and the various pathways for introduction through intentional and unintentional means. He noted the limited information about MIS in East Asian Seas despite region’s vulnerability to the phenomena. Mr. Vellayutham noted that MIS has been identified as an emerging issue in the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA adopted in January 2008.

57. He then described the COBSEA Training & Review Workshop on MIS that was held on 31 August – 4 September 2009 to support the development of a regional programme on MIS, and the main objectives and components of the suggested regional programme on MIS: creating an enabling environment for MIS management; building the information base; and enhancing implementation of Best Practice. He also identified the main regional and global partners to this recommended programme and requested the IGM to discuss the matter and endorse the regional programme that was recommended by the group of experts and the Secretariat.

58. The Coordinator requested the meeting to consider the adoption of the regional programme on MIS, while its future will depend on availability of funds to implement the programme and to develop the regional strategy or action plan on MIS. He noted that a possible source of funding for this important activity would be to integrate it into the SAP Implementation project, under the ecosystem component.

59. Some concerns were expressed by some countries on possible overlapping or duplication with other MIS initiatives carried out in the region such as the one by IOC/WESTPAC and the APEC Working Group on MIS or global initiatives such as IMO's Convention on ballast water or the GloBallast programme.

60. But the Secretariat reassured the meeting that in the preparation of the programme and the future action plan on MIS all partners were fully consulted and work has been closely coordinated with them. MIS activities would be implemented without duplication and through cooperation with all relevant partners, in particular with IOC/WESTPAC that provide technical and scientific aspects while COBSEA will serve as the management and capacity building platform.

61. All countries supported the initiative and approved the MIS regional programme for COBSEA pending the availability of funds. The meeting has also agreed that a component on MIS will be developed under the GEF SAP Implementation project to provide adequate funding for this high priority activity, as MIS is an emerging concern for the region threatening the health and productivity of coastal and marine ecosystems.

AGENDA ITEM 9: UNEP MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY AND MARINE STRATEGY

62. The Chairperson invited Dr. Jacqueline Alder, Coordinator of the Marine and Coastal Environment Branch, DEPI/UNEP to present Document IGM 20/9 on UNEP's Medium Term Strategy (MTS) and to give an insight into its relevance to COBSEA. Dr. Jackie Alder noted that the UNEP 2009-2013 MTS sets out the next phase in the evolution of UNEP as it becomes a more effective, efficient and results-focused entity meeting the expectations of its stakeholders in responding to global environmental challenges and opportunities. The MTS provides the high-level programmatic results framework against which the overall performance of UNEP will be judged and it also provides the vision and direction for all UNEP activities for the period 2010-2013.

63. Dr. Alder indicated that UNEP has identified six thematic cross cutting priorities that will be the focus of its efforts and the basis for the UNEP sub programmes: (1) Climate Change; (2) Disasters and Conflicts; (3) Ecosystem Management; (4) Environmental Governance; (5) Harmful Substances; and (6) Resource Efficiency. She noted that the MTS also identifies the means that UNEP will use to implement these priorities, and the institutional mechanisms that will need to be put in place to deliver results in an effective and efficient manner.

64. The Chairman then invited Dr. Jackie Alder to present Document IGM 20/10 on UNEP/DEPI's new Marine and Coastal Strategy (MCS) and its relevance to COBSEA's work. Dr. Alder presented the new MCS – "*The Other 70%: UNEP Marine and Coastal Strategy*" and explained that the UNEP MTS provides the overall framework for the development of the marine and coastal strategy and that both are closely linked. She described the four "streams" of the MCS as Land-ocean connections, marine ecosystems for human well-being, vulnerable people and places, and reconciling resource use and marine conservation. She then explained how the new MCS will be integrated into the Programme of Work of UNEP for 2010/2011 and noted that although COBSEA's workplan is defined

by the IGM and its member countries, UNEP/DEPI will work closely with COBSEA to ensure harmony and interlinkages between the programmes and that UNEP sees COBSEA, like the other Regional Seas programmes, as its regional implementing platform for its MCS in the East Asian Seas region.

65. The meeting requested some clarifications on the role of the Regional Seas and of COBSEA in implementing UNEP's marine strategy and adequate explanations were provided by Dr. Alder. The meeting took note of Dr. Alder's presentations and expressed its general agreement and support for a close and coordinated work between COBSEA and UNEP HQ.

66. The meeting also expressed its clear wish that COBSEA will continue to be supported, both financially and programmatically by UNEP.

AGENDA ITEM 10: FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR COBSEA

67. The Chairperson invited the Coordinator to present the Document IGM 20/11 on the "Financial Sustainability for COBSEA". Dr. Elik Adler noted that during the last years external support to COBSEA has decreased substantially and that since 2005 UNEP is no longer providing financial support to COBSEA's operating costs. This cost is now fully covered by the East Asian Seas Trust Fund. He emphasized that the need for increased contributions from the member-states to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund has been highlighted regularly in all the UNEP Progress Reports to the COBSEA IGMs but there has not been any positive response. He explained that there is a discrepancy between country contributions to the Trust Fund amounting to USD 171,600, and the annual cost of the Secretariat amounting to around USD 560,000. Currently, the situation has become critical because the Trust Fund would be completely depleted in early 2011.

68. He noted that cost-cutting measures were put in place since his arrival to COBSEA and that now the Secretariat operates with only two Professional Officers and one general service staff which together with the lack of funds for activities, severely limits the ability of the Secretariat to deliver meaningful activities to COBSEA member countries.

69. The Coordinator also reminded the meeting that the 19th IGM of COBSEA, countries adopted a resolution agreeing to review the pledges to the Trust Fund at the 20th Meeting of COBSEA. He explained that an annual core funding of USD 560,000 is now needed to operate the COBSEA Secretariat and in order to achieve this level of annual income the country contributions need to be more than tripled, to sustain COBSEA and the functioning of its the Secretariat.

70. Dr. Adler explained that major projects can and are funded by various donors but such funding cannot cover the Secretariat's operating costs. The Secretariat proposed three options for the financial arrangements of COBSEA and the member countries' support to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund. However, he noted that countries may also assist the mere survival of COBSEA in the coming years by other means of support such as assigning/seconding their respective country officers to the Secretariat in Bangkok, taking the role of Lead Country in one of COBSEA's priority activities such as Marine Litter or Invasive Species, or opening a Regional Activity Center (RAC) in their country that will serve the whole region.

71. He also noted that COBSEA being a part of UNEP should be provided with UNEP's financial support for its core operation because at present, COBSEA operates at "no cost" to UNEP. Moreover, the Trust Fund pays a 13% Project Support Cost (PSC) to UNON (UN Office in Nairobi) for its financial administration. He ended his presentation by noting that the situation was critical

and by his plea to COBSEA countries to increase their financial contributions to the Trust Fund, as without this increase the whole of COBSEA's future is not secured or sustainable.

72. The Chairperson, Dr. Chu Hoi invited delegations to discuss the paper and to provide their recommendations to guide the Secretariat with regard to the future financial sustainability of COBSEA.

73. In general, the meeting took note and recognized the critical financial situation in which COBSEA is at present. The meeting understood that according to the Secretariat report, the Trust Fund would be completely depleted by early 2011. Several delegates have expressed a strong wish that UNEP, as a "mother organization" of COBSEA, will re-institute the financial support it has given for many years to COBSEA's core and operational costs, namely the cost of the Secretariat staff.

74. All COBSEA delegates noted that at present, as much as they would have liked to raise their contributions, unfortunately, their respective Governments are not in the position of doing so. In some countries the legal and administrative procedure of raising the contribution is complex and lengthy and in the light of the global and national crisis, their respective Governments would not be able to agree with the increase of the contribution.

75. Some Delegates have also noted that their countries will consider other options for supporting COBSEA, such as taking a lead role in specific projects or seconding junior officers to the COBSEA Secretariat.

76. The representative of UNEP, Dr. Jackie Alder noted that UNEP would be happy to continue programmatic support to COBSEA, as it is doing for other Regional Seas programmes. UNEP also considers COBSEA as a programme of the countries of the region, and at the request of countries it has taken responsibility for managing the Secretariat. However, it is the responsibility of countries of the region, like in other Regional Seas, to mobilize the political and financial commitment to sustain COBSEA, and UNEP will assist in seeking and mobilizing resources as much as possible. UNEP would be happy to continue and provide the UN umbrella under which COBSEA operates, but if countries will decide to seek another organization to work with, UNEP will respect that decision. It is hoped that if such a decision were to be taken it would not be based on a lack of performance in managing the Secretariat, but solely for financial reasons.

77. The meeting has also requested the COBSEA Secretariat to approach UNEP HQ and ask the appropriate functions in the organization to consider waiving the 13% Project Support Cost to the weakened and fast depleting COBSEA Trust Fund.

78. The discussion on this agenda item ended with the meeting's agreement that for the time being countries will continue to pay their contributions according to the present scale. The meeting also emphasized the request of countries for UNEP to support COBSEA in terms of Secretariat staff salaries, while the Trust Fund will be utilized for activities.

AGENDA ITEM 11: COBSEA'S WAY FORWARD

79. The Chairperson, Dr. Nguyen Chu Hoi, asked COBSEA Coordinator to present Document IGM 20/12 on COBSEA's Way Forward. The Coordinator noted that COBSEA, which is an integral part of UNEP, is conceived by many partners and member countries as a weak Regional Seas programme. The main reasons are: (a) extremely limited human and financial resources which have

weakened the Secretariat and its ability to deliver and hence, lack of benefit seen by countries from COBSEA and loss of interest; (b) competition with other regional programmes and GEF projects; (c) weak political and financial commitment of member countries; and (d) lack of substantive support from UNEP. He noted that it is a joint interest and shared responsibility of both COBSEA member countries and of UNEP to own and operate an effective and visible programme and that rebuilding COBSEA can be done only with the full mobilization of support from countries, UNEP and external donors.

80. Dr. Adler presented the view and the recommendations of the Secretariat to both UNEP HQ and to COBSEA countries on how to join forces in the attempt to strengthen and revitalize COBSEA. He thanked both UNEP and the COBSEA countries for their genuine efforts to raise their respective contributions to the Trust Fund. He noted that we have to be realistic and in the absence of present sources of funding for the Secretariat we should develop a conservative and careful approach when designing COBSEA's Workplan for 2010/2011.

81. He recommended hence, that COBSEA will concentrate in the coming years, on very limited but well defined activities in which COBSEA can deliver, in order to regain the confidence and trust of Governments. These activities have to be well coordinated with other regional players in order to avoid duplication of efforts and resources.

82. He recommended that COBSEA will concentrate on the following activities:

- (i) Developing the GEF project SAP Implementation;
- (ii) Implementing the Sida project on spatial planning;
- (iii) Develop, and if resources will be made available, implement the three priority activities: marine invasive species, marine litter and coastal erosion and integrate these activities into the coming GEF project;
- (iv) Resource mobilization; and
- (v) Develop other activities in line with *the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)* if adequate external resources will be identified.

83. After a discussion, the Chairperson concluded that the meeting agreed with this suggestion and that indeed COBSEA Secretariat should concentrate on those activities in the coming years. The chairperson has called again upon COBSEA countries to consider other ways to support COBSEA's work.

AGENDA ITEM 12: DRAFT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET 2010-2011

84. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the draft work plan and budget for 2010-2011. The Secretariat presented the two options which depend on two different funding scenarios.

85. After a short discussion the meeting agreed that a more conservative and careful approach should be taken and decided that the workplan and budget for 2010-2011 would be as presented in table 2 (option 2) in Document IGM 20/13 (see **Annex III**) with a total budget of USD 435,000 for 2010 and USD 480,000 for 2011.

AGENDA ITEM 13: OTHER MATTERS

86. The Republic of Korea informed the meeting on the International Conference on Transboundary Co-Prosperity in the Asian Seas, to be held in December 2009 in Seoul. The organizer invited COBSEA countries' participation and would graciously sponsor interested relevant participants who may be in need of support.

87. The COBSEA Coordinator had sought the IGM advice and guidance on PEMSEA's invitation to COBSEA to join PEMSEA's non-country partnership. There were mixed reactions from countries on the matter and after a discussion the meeting agreed that the Secretariat should present to the next IGM a detailed proposal on the matter, clarifying the advantages, disadvantages, procedures and legal aspects of such a move. The next IGM, being more informed, would then be able to take the right decision.

88. On the invitation of new members to join COBSEA, the meeting agreed, after a discussion, that the Secretariat should further explore the possibility for Japan and Brunei to join COBSEA. The Secretariat was requested to continue early negotiations with those countries on the matter and to inform the IGM accordingly. At the same time the meeting noted that while the Secretariat continues with these efforts, more focus should be given to issues pertaining to the future sustainability of COBSEA.

89. In order to be in line with becoming paperless, carbon-light and environmentally friendly, the meeting agreed that as of the next IGM delegates will be given a "memory stick" with all the documents, while for those Delegates who wish to receive a hard copy, those will be printed in the meeting venue by the host country.

AGENDA ITEM 14: DATE AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

90. The Chairperson invited offers from the countries to host the 21st Meeting of COBSEA. The Chairperson has warmly recommended that member countries that have not hosted an IGM in the last five years would seriously consider doing so.

91. The Coordinator reminded the meeting that most financial expenses relating to the organization of the IGM are usually covered by the COBSEA Trust Fund. As there were no offers from countries at this point, it was agreed that the Secretariat will approach countries individually and in the absence of a host country, the Secretariat will organize the meeting in a "neutral place". The Secretariat proposed to hold the 21st Meeting of COBSEA in November 2011.

AGENDA ITEM 15: CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

92. The Chairperson, Dr. Nguyen Chu Hoi thanked, on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam all the COBSEA delegates who have attended the meeting for their good spirit of cooperation and for the efforts they made to help and support COBSEA. He expressed his hopes that COBSEA will become again a meaningful organization for its member countries and sustainable on the long-run.

93. Singapore, on behalf of all member countries thanked the Chairperson and the Secretariat for a well organized meeting and for their hard work and thanked the Government of Viet Nam for its kind hospitality.

94. On Wednesday 4th November 2009 at 18:10, the Chairperson declared the meeting closed.

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ANNEX II**AGENDA OF THE 20TH INTERGOVERNMENTAL OF COBSEA****1. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

- 1.1 Welcome address on behalf of Quang Ninh Province, Viet Nam
- 1.2 Remarks by the Chair of the Nineteenth Meeting of COBSEA
- 1.3 Opening remarks on behalf of the Government of Viet Nam
- 1.4 Opening remarks on behalf of UNEP
- 1.5 Introduction of participants
- 1.6 Presentation of credentials

2. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

- 2.1 Designation of officers
- 2.2 Organization of work
- 2.3 Adoption of the meeting agenda

3. PROGRESS REPORT ON COBSEA'S ACTIVITIES 2008-2009

- 3.1 Report from the Secretariat
- 3.2 Green Fins

4. ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE UNEP/GEF PROJECT "SOUTH CHINA SEA STRATEGIC ACTION PROGRAMME (SAP) IMPLEMENTATION"**5. SIDA/COBSEA PROJECT "SPATIAL PLANNING IN THE COASTAL ZONE"****6. EAST ASIAN SEAS KNOWLEDGEBASE – REPORT AND WAY FORWARD****7: EAST ASIAN SEAS ENVIRONMENT OUTLOOK (EASEO): STATE OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT REPORT****8. COBSEA'S REGIONAL INITIATIVE ON MARINE INVASIVE SPECIES****9. UNEP MEDIUM TERM STRATEGY AND MARINE STRATEGY****10. FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY FOR COBSEA****11: COBSEA'S WAY FORWARD****12: DRAFT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET 2010-2011****13: OTHER MATTERS****14: DATE AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING****15: CLOSURE OF THE MEETING****PLEASE NOTE:**

The last day of the meeting, Thursday 5th November 2009 will be devoted to a field trip – a cruise on the beautiful Ha Long Bay, which is a UNESCO World Heritage site.

ANNEX III**RESOLUTIONS OF THE 20TH INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING OF COBSEA;
2-5 NOVEMBER 2009, HA LONG CITY, VIET NAM****Resolution 1 – The GEF Project SAP Implementation**

Recalling the decisions of the 19th Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA;

Recalling the *New Strategic Direction of COBSEA 2008-2012*;

Recognizing that the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) will contribute to the capacities of COBSEA countries to protect and better manage their marine and coastal resources;

Desiring to develop a new GEF project for the region of East Asian Seas that will implement the SAP in benefit of the improved livelihood and well-being of coastal communities in the region;

Mindful that member countries support the role of COBSEA in the development and implementation of the SAP;

The 20th Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA:

- Requests COBSEA Secretariat to develop a Project Information Format (PIF) for the GEF Project “SAP Implementation” in collaboration with the UNEP/DGEF and through a process of coordination and consultations with COBSEA member countries and the GEF Secretariat;
- Requests the Secretariat to include emerging issues of regional concern such as marine invasive species, marine litter and coastal erosion as integral activities of the SAP Implementation project; and
- Decides that SAP Implementation project will be executed within COBSEA framework and will be hosted within the COBSEA Secretariat.

**Resolution 2 – Regional Programme on Marine
and Coastal Invasive Species**

Noting that Invasive Alien Species are now generally recognized as one of the greatest threats to biodiversity globally, and in the marine and coastal environments they have been identified as a major threat to the world’s oceans;

Recognizing that the coastal and marine ecosystems in the East Asian Seas are among the richest and most productive in the world, of vast social and economic importance and are under threat of harmful effects of marine invasive species;

Mindful that the region has one of the world’s highest concentration of shipping and fishing vessel activities, and holds a significant percentage to the global aquaculture production. All of these are acting as important pathways for the introduction of alien species;

Noting that marine invasive species have been identified as an emerging threat to the marine and coastal ecosystems in the East Asian Seas region;

Desiring to build capacities in COBSEA countries to address the emerging transboundary threat of marine and coastal invasive species and recalling that this is in line with the *New Strategic Direction of COBSEA 2008-2012*;

Mindful of the need to develop a regional coordinated strategy that will build capacities of COBSEA countries to address the threat of marine invasive species and increase the public awareness to the matter;

The 20th COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting:

- Endorses the Marine Invasive Species (MIS) Programme as presented by the COBSEA Secretariat and requests the Secretariat to develop it, pending the availability of resources, in coordination and cooperation with other relevant partners and without duplicating other regional and global initiatives; and
- Requests the Secretariat to report on the progress of the MIS Programme to the next Intergovernmental Meeting.

**Resolution 3 – Workplan and Budget for 2010-2011
and the Way Forward for COBSEA**

Recalling the *New Strategic Direction of COBSEA 2008-2012* and recalling also previous decisions of the Intergovernmental Meetings related to the development and implementation of the Programme of Work for COBSEA;

Recognizing that COBSEA has suffered in recent years from financial and human resources shortages and challenges;

Noting the critical situation of the East Asian Seas Trust Fund and also being aware that without ample and urgent increase of support and contributions to the Trust Fund, it may have limited abilities to deliver a full and comprehensive Programme of Work;

Adopting a conservative and careful approach and trying to conserve the limited resources of the Trust Fund;

Wishing to provide realistic guidance to the COBSEA Secretariat so that it can focus its activities in the coming biennium;

The 20th COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting:

- Approves the COBSEA Workplan and Budget for 2010-2011 as detailed in table 1 below and requests the COBSEA Secretariat to implement it accordingly; and
- Decides that COBSEA will concentrate, in the coming years, on a limited number but well defined activities that will be coordinated with other regional players, in order to avoid duplication of efforts and resources. These activities will be the following:
 1. Developing the GEF project “SAP Implementation”;
 2. Implementing the Sida project on spatial planning;
 3. Develop, and if resources will be made available, implement the three priority activities: marine invasive species, marine litter and coastal erosion and integrate these activities into the GEF project;
 4. Resource mobilization; and
 5. Develop other activities in line with *New Strategic Direction of COBSEA 2008-2012* if adequate external resources would be made available.

Table 1: COBSEA Workplan and Budget for 2010-2011 as approved by the 20th IGM

Planned Expenditures In x 1,000 USD	Used in 2008	Used in 2009	Planned 2010	Planned 2011	Comments
Personnel					
Coordinator	176	270	185	190	
Programme Officer	144	154	160	180	Increased costs in 2011 due to repatriation and new recruitment.
Administrative Assistant	68	33	70	72	
Senior secretary	55	53	*	–	* Post becomes vacant and frozen until better times for COBSEA.
Sub Total – Personnel	443	510	415	442	
Activities					No activities
COBSEA IGM		20		25	
Sub Total – Activities		20		25	
Operational costs					
Rent	12	12	14	14	
Office equipment, supply, communication, print, and misc.	2	10	6	6	
Sub Total – Operational	14	22	20	20	
Total	457	552	435	487	According to estimates, Trust Fund will become fully depleted in early 2011.

