



COBSEA

COORDINATING BODY ON
THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA

New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)



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For bibliographic purposes this document may be cited as:
UNEP, 2008. *New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)*. COBSEA Secretariat, United Nations Environment Programme. 23 pages.

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Cover Image: East Asian Seas region

Printed and bound in Thailand by: PK. Printers

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THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA

**New Strategic Direction
for COBSEA
(2008-2012)**

23 January 2008

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASOEN	ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment
AWGCME	ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment
AWGF	APEC Working Group on Fisheries
AWGMRC	APEC Working Group on Marine Resources and Conservation
CCC	COBSEA Coordinating Centre
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
EAS/RCU	East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GPA	Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (of UNEP)
IOC/WESTPAC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific
LMEs	Large Marine Ecosystems
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements
NFP	National Focal Point
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NOWPAP	Northwest Pacific Action Plan
PEMSEA	Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia
SCS Project	UNEP/GEF Project on Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
SDS-SEA	Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP/ROAP	United Nations Environment Programme Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

PREAMBLE

Recalling the decisions of the 17th Meeting of COBSEA;

Recalling the resolution from the 18th Meeting of COBSEA on the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA;

Recalling the resolution from the Special Intergovernmental Session of COBSEA on Recommendations to the 19th Meeting of COBSEA on the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA;

Desiring to strengthen the implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan through an enhanced engagement of COBSEA in the three thematic areas of marine and land-based pollution, coastal and marine habitat conservation and management and response to coastal disasters;

Recognizing that the four inter-linked strategies of information management, national capacity building, identifying and addressing strategic and emerging issues and facilitating regional cooperation would contribute to the sustainable development of the East Asian Seas region; and

Reaffirming that the new strategic direction for COBSEA for the period 2008-2012 would revitalize and re-orientate COBSEA as an intergovernmental organization that can assist and support the member countries in the management of the coastal and marine environment.

The 19th Meeting of COBSEA:

Adopts the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012);

Agrees to review the pledges to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund at the 20th Meeting of COBSEA;

Requests the Secretariat of COBSEA to:

- I. Continue to approach member countries, donor countries and relevant international organizations regarding possible in kind and other contribution to support the implementation of activities in line with the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012); and
- II. Consult with member countries regarding possible increased and differentiated voluntary contributions to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund and to present different options for the level of contributions to the 20th Meeting of COBSEA for its consideration.

Urges member countries to support the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012) through national implementation of activities and to report their achievements to the 20th Meeting of COBSEA.

Siem Reap, Cambodia
22-23 January 2008

BACKGROUND

1. The UNEP Regional Seas Programme was launched in 1974 in the wake of the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm. It aims to address the accelerating degradation of the world's oceans and coastal areas through the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environments and by engaging neighbouring countries in comprehensive and specific actions to protect their shared marine environment.
2. In East Asia, five states (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) recognized that: "steps are urgently needed to formulate and establish a scientific programme involving research, prevention and control of marine pollution and monitoring". In response, the UNEP Governing Council supported the establishment of a regional seas programme for East Asia in 1977.
3. An Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Region (the East Asian Seas Action Plan) was adopted in 1981. The East Asian Seas Trust Fund was established to finance activities and the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) was formed to provide overall policy coordination of the East Asian Seas Action Plan.
4. In 1993 the East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit (EAS/RCU) was established to manage fewer, larger and regional projects. By 1994, COBSEA's membership expanded with the addition of Australia, Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and Viet Nam to its present number of ten member countries.
5. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) was adopted in 1995 and in 2000 COBSEA endorsed the Regional Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the East Asian Seas from the Effects of Land-based Activities.
6. In 1996 the EAS/RCU started the development of the UNEP/GEF Project entitled "Reversing Environmental Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand". The project was initiated to address environmental problems of the marine environment in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand and includes seven of the ten COBSEA member countries, i.e., Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The project brief was endorsed at the 15th Meeting of COBSEA in 2000 and the project became operational in 2002. The overall goals of this project are to create an environment, at the regional level, in which collaboration and partnership (between all stakeholders and at all levels) in addressing the environmental problems of the South China Sea is fostered and encouraged and to enhance the capacity of the participating governments to integrate environmental considerations into national development planning.
7. At the 16th Meeting of COBSEA in 2001 and consequently at the 17th Meeting in 2004, COBSEA member countries were informed that financial support from the UNEP Environment Fund would be reduced. In all the Regional Seas Programmes, support for the secretariat comes from member countries. UNEP, according to its mandate, is not a funding organization and the Environment Fund has been established to provide seed funds to address various global, regional and national environmental issues.
8. An independent review of the East Asian Seas Action Plan was conducted in 2003 and recommended a refocus of COBSEA. Work on a White Paper commenced in November 2004. The proposed new strategic direction for COBSEA was discussed at two regional meetings in Bangkok in early 2005; the First Regional Partners Workshop on Regional Coordination Mechanisms in the East Asian Seas Region on 9-10 May and the Brainstorming Meeting of

National Focal Points on the New Strategic Direction for COBSEA on 11 May. Representatives from partner programmes and bodies such as AWGCME, IOC/WESTPAC, NOWPAP, PEMSEA, SCS Project and SEAFDEC as well as from member countries endorsed in principle the rationale for a revitalized COBSEA. A draft White Paper was circulated in June 2005 and comments sought from member countries. This resulted in a revised draft that was discussed at the 18th Meeting of COBSEA held in Sanya, the People's Republic of China, on 24-25 January 2006. The present document takes into account the discussions and recommendations from these events as well as subsequent written comments from countries.

9. After the COBSEA member countries' formal endorsement of the White Paper, it will represent the new direction of COBSEA and guide the secretariat when implementing activities to support the East Asian Seas Action Plan during the coming five years (2008-2012). After five years the contents of the White Paper will be reviewed and revised by the COBSEA member countries in order to reflect the developments in the East Asian Seas region and any new priorities of the COBSEA member countries.

CHALLENGES

10. When COBSEA was formed in 1981, there was a need to assess the state of the coastal and marine environment and to initiate actions to address some of the main problems. For this reason, COBSEA's activities were primarily project-oriented with a focus on gathering scientific information on certain issues such as marine pollution, the state of coastal resources and oceanography. However, there is still a need to translate the gathered information into policy recommendations and in many cases, into adequate management policies and strategies to address the identified coastal and marine environmental problems at national and regional levels.

11. Since the inception of COBSEA, other regional programmes and projects dealing with the marine and coastal environment have been developing in the East Asian Seas region. This expansion of activities was, however, not matched by appropriate regional coordination and has resulted in a sometimes overlapping and inefficient use of human and financial resources. Results of projects have often not been effectively used beyond project conclusion and outcomes could be made available to a broader range of agencies across the East Asian Seas region than is currently the case. The analyzes and syntheses of "project clusters" that pursue similar issues are sometimes sub-optimal and lessons learned from individual projects are not always made available to new projects.

12. East Asia's economic growth is accelerating together with coastal industrialization and increasing exploitation of the region's coastal and marine resources. If not managed collectively and in an ecologically sustainable manner, environmental degradation in the East Asian Seas region could well undermine the economic gains made, and threaten the region's rich and unique biodiversity. If the sustainable development of the region is to be achieved, appropriately targeted actions to increase the capacities among the COBSEA member countries to respond to marine and coastal environmental issues are essential.

13. Emerging environmental threats are posing new challenges to the COBSEA member countries. In many cases there is limited research and understanding of the impact of such strategic and emerging issues on the coastal and marine environment in the East Asian Seas region.

14. While many of the programmes and projects that have developed in the East Asian Seas region started as technical/scientific responses to specific environmental problems, some have been evolving into policy-level intergovernmental structures that must be taken into account when developing a new strategic direction for COBSEA.

15. Decreasing support from UNEP for the operation of the EAS/RCU has not been matched by a commensurate increase in member contribution to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund and some countries have been less than forthcoming with their pledged annual contributions. As a result, the funding situation for operating the secretariat is critical. However, funding for the implementation of COBSEA's activities has in the past been derived mainly from external funding and from the UNEP Environment Fund.

OBJECTIVES

16. The new strategic direction is intended to enhance COBSEA as a regional intergovernmental body that can strengthen the national capacities of member countries and assist in identifying and addressing relevant strategic and emerging issues. As such, it suggests four strategies to address the identified challenges during the next five years. The new strategic direction will encompass the elements of science and policy coordination and project implementation.

17. The new direction will be operationalized by the biennial work plans presented to the COBSEA intergovernmental meetings.

STRATEGIES

18. Four operative, inter-linked strategies have been identified in order to implement COBSEA's new strategic direction. The new strategic direction will transform COBSEA into a regional coastal and marine environmental coordinating centre that strengthens national capacities of member countries and identifies and addresses strategic and emerging issues relevant to the East Asian Seas region.

19. Through its strategy on *information management*, COBSEA will establish a "one-stop-shop" or knowledgebase to provide stakeholders with information on programmes and projects and the state of the coastal and marine environment in the East Asian Seas region. This knowledgebase will, together with information synthesis and reporting activities, constitute the COBSEA Coordinating Centre (CCC). The CCC is intended to improve the information flow on activities in the East Asian Seas region and will also be used for the identification of national capacity building needs and strategic and emerging coastal and marine environmental issues.

20. Through its strategy on *national capacity building*, COBSEA will strengthen its member countries capacities in responding to the growing pressures exerted on the coastal and marine environment and the increasing need for sustainable management of their natural resources.

21. Through its strategy on *strategic and emerging issues*, COBSEA will assist its member countries in identifying and addressing upcoming issues of priority to the East Asian Seas region.

22. Through its strategy on *regional cooperation*, COBSEA will implement its new strategic direction in collaboration with its member countries and its regional partners and work to prevent duplication of efforts. Suitable formal or informal collaborative arrangements between COBSEA and its partners will be identified and pursued by the COBSEA Secretariat.

23. The thematic areas to be addressed through COBSEA's new direction and its four strategies are based on existing relevant global agreements and obligations as well as previous COBSEA decisions and resolutions. These thematic areas include the following:

- Marine and land-based pollution;
- Coastal and marine habitat conservation; and
- Management and response to coastal disasters.

24. The four strategies and their key elements are described in Table 1.

Table 1: COBSEA Strategies and Key Elements

<p><i>Strategy 1:</i> <i>Information Management</i></p>	<p>Key Elements of Strategy 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of the COBSEA Coordinating Centre (CCC); and • State of Marine Environment reporting.
<p><i>Strategy 2:</i> <i>National Capacity Building</i></p>	<p>Key Elements of Strategy 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of country specific needs and priorities; • Assist countries in meeting with obligations under relevant MEAs and other international and regional agreements, resolutions and decisions; • Assist knowledge-transfer and sharing of lessons learned between COBSEA member countries; and • Assist in improving national capacities in managing the marine environment.
<p><i>Strategy 3:</i> <i>Strategic and Emerging Issues</i></p>	<p>Key Elements of Strategy 3:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiation of studies to determine the status and potential response measures regarding strategic and emerging issues of priority in the East Asian Seas region; • Alert member countries and raise awareness among governments and the public regarding the problems being encountered; and • Propose capacity building measures and seek donor funding to assist their implementation among the COBSEA member countries.
<p><i>Strategy 4:</i> <i>Regional Cooperation</i></p>	<p>Key Elements of Strategy 4:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance cooperation with regional partner organizations during the implementation of COBSEA's new strategic direction through identifying and pursuing suitable formal or informal arrangements for cooperation in specific thematic areas; and • Identify mechanisms for collaborating with regional partner organizations in establishing the CCC as a provider of knowledge from past and ongoing activities in the East Asian Seas region.

25. These strategies are consistent with other relevant UNEP-related strategies such as the UNEP Global Regional Seas Strategic Directions for 2004-2007, the UNEP/ROAP Strategic Vision and the Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building.

26. Through these strategies COBSEA will continue to implement projects as long as they are consistent with its coordination focus, meet prior commitments, and/or respond to strategic and emerging issues of regional importance. Obtaining project funding and project implementation require much time and effort. For this reason, efforts will be made to secure the attachment of project-funded staff at the secretariat.

27. Financial resources for the implementation of these four strategies are envisioned to be derived primarily from donor agencies. Costs can be reduced through potential cost sharing with partner agencies. In addition, there will be room for in kind and/or earmarked financial contributions from the COBSEA member countries to support the activities.

Strategy 1: Information Management

28. The overall objective of this strategy is to develop a COBSEA Coordinating Centre (CCC) in order to allow for increased information exchange on coastal and marine environmental management measures and identify lessons-learned and best practices.

29. At present, there is a wide range of global databases including data and information on the extent and status of marine and coastal resources. However, the regional database for COBSEA has a limited set of data and information. It is therefore very difficult to get a comprehensive overview of which data and information is readily available from public sources. There is also limited information available of past or ongoing project activities in the East Asian Seas region and the lessons learned from such activities.

30. The development of a CCC will ensure reliable and up-to-date information flows regarding projects and programmes concerned with coastal and marine environmental issues in the East Asian Seas region. It can allow countries to have such information available at a single point of contact. The CCC can facilitate the provision of scientific information to member countries that may be needed in order to make policy recommendations and in identifying strategic and emerging issues of relevance to the region. Furthermore, a database on regional projects and programmes will provide member countries, donors and recipients, information of the funding that can in turn avoid overlaps and duplications.

31. The CCC will use the gathered information to develop overviews of the state of the marine and coastal environment for the identified thematic priority areas. In addition, information on best practices and lessons learned will be derived from follow-up of projects and the analysis of their outcomes. Such information can be the basis for the formulation of policy guidelines and also identify gaps that may have an influence on the direction of new initiatives.

32. The tangible benefits of the CCC to the member countries would include: (a) the compilation of knowledge and information from numerous ongoing projects and programmes in the East Asian Seas region; (b) the use of this information to help build capacities at different levels in the member countries; (c) the use of this information to facilitate coordination among project and programme activities at national and regional levels; (d) the raising of donors' confidence to "invest" in a region that can demonstrate a successful mechanism to avoid duplication of efforts and that can achieve the efficient use of efforts and the widespread application of results; and (e) the efficiency gains reaped from greater integration of activities and synthesis of knowledge and outcomes across a number of national economic sectors.

33. The CCC will be developed in close collaboration with national institutions among the COBSEA member countries. One of these institutions could be identified for long-term maintenance and updating of a regional knowledgebase and other online information resources. Resources for the development and maintenance of the CCC will be derived from donor funds and in kind contributions. An efficient and cost-effective design of the CCC is important in order to ensure its sustainability.

34. The CCC will be operationalized by the secretariat through various project activities including:

- The establishment of a "one-stop-shop" or regional knowledgebase for collecting and synthesising information from coastal and marine related activities in the East Asian Seas region;
- The maintenance of a hardcopy library of textbooks, project documents, annual reports and project outputs;
- The harmonization and, upon subject to funding, an expansion of existing expert and manager networks;
- The COBSEA Secretariat will facilitate the use of networks of experts and managers to analyze and synthesise project/programme-based knowledge, state of marine environment data, lessons learned and best practices. Significant outcomes of this process will be the availability of regular state of marine environment and "lessons learned" reports on priority areas by the COBSEA Secretariat. These can then be translated into guidelines and criteria as and when appropriate; and

- In addition, the CCC will provide, upon request, assistance in developing project proposals. Donors will also be provided information on programmes and projects in the East Asian Seas region when required.

35. Through the information management strategy, COBSEA will support member countries in replicating the CCC at the national level, if appropriate.

36. These national CCCs would be closely linked to the regional CCC initiative. Ultimately, and, if member countries so desire, these national CCCs may evolve into a national clearing-house for coastal and marine environment activities and state of marine environment data and information.

37. Establishment and maintenance of an up-to-date and reliable information systems is an essential pre-requisite for COBSEA to be able to harmonize and coordinate marine and coastal environment projects/programmes in the East Asian Seas region. UNEP/ROAP has recognized this need and initiated the “Regional Environmental Knowledge Hub”, a regional strategy to widen access by individuals, institutions and government agencies to the large repository of data, information and knowledge that is available in the East Asian Seas region on environmental issues. COBSEA information management activities aim to complement and further enhance the UNEP/ROAP initiative for marine and coastal resources.

38. The work plan for operationalizing the strategy on information management may include the following activities. These activities will consider differences in capacities of the member countries of COBSEA.

Activities: Strategy 1. Information Management	Timelines
<i>Initiate the CCC through establishing a regional knowledgebase and a pilot national database in one COBSEA member country.</i>	<i>6 months</i>
<i>The regional knowledgebase will initially describe the activities of at least 20 projects or programmes from each of the following: mangrove and/or wetlands, coral reef and seagrass habitats and marine- and land-based sources of pollution.</i>	
<i>Develop a regional state of marine environment report making use of existing networks of experts and managers.</i>	<i>2 years</i>
<i>Expand the regional CCC to include a comprehensive overview of ongoing projects and programmes in the East Asian Seas region.</i>	<i>5 years</i>
<i>Provide regular state of marine environment reports and lessons learned reports integrating the information on coastal and marine environment activities identified through the CCC on selected thematic areas.</i>	

Strategy 2: National Capacity Building

39. The overall objective for this strategy is for COBSEA to engage in capacity building activities among its member countries to assist in developing and strengthening the institutional foundations and systems that are necessary pre-requisites for enhancing member countries’ capacities in coastal and marine environmental management, considering the differences in capacities among the COBSEA member countries.

40. The national capacity building strategy will be aimed at improving the implementation of relevant MEAs to which countries are parties and assist non-parties in the ratification process. This strategy will also cover other international agreements and obligations, which are of priority to the region. Activities can be in the form of exchange of experiences and lessons learned between countries and organizations, preparation of policy guidelines on prioritized thematic areas, provision of support for national implementation plans (e.g., trainings of enforcement officers), technology transfer, support for the development of national databases and for developing common regional objectives. This is in line with the Regional Seas Strategic Directions that aim to increase the use of Regional Seas as a platform for developing common regional objectives, promoting synergies and coordinated regional implementation of relevant MEAs, global and regional agreements and obligations.

41. In addition, COBSEA will enhance the member countries' capacities in addressing identified strategic and emerging issues, through activities targeting management, protection, policy development and public education. COBSEA will assist member countries in identifying needs and formulating programmes on national capacity building and in identifying potential donors for capacity building initiatives and for providing technical support.

42. One measure to strengthen the management of coastal and marine resources and enhance the implementation of important MEAs is through the development or improvement of national marine environment policies. As part of its national capacity building strategy, COBSEA will provide assistance to its member countries, when required, to develop such policies.

43. Through the CCC, COBSEA will provide for a mechanism by which there can be a quick identification of opportunities for knowledge transfer between the COBSEA member countries and opportunities for collaboration with other regional programmes and projects. National ownership and intra-regional knowledge and resource transfer, e.g., through use of expertise from within the East Asian Seas region, will be encouraged whenever it is practical and feasible. National lead agencies, nominated by member countries will manage capacity building activities with support from the secretariat whose primary responsibility would be to collect and provide relevant information from the CCC and adapt it to the individual needs of the countries. In this way, COBSEA will provide a forum for sharing experiences and lessons learned between countries in the East Asian Seas region on specific priority issues.

44. The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity-building provides a coherent platform for internal coordination and exchange of information among UNEP, other UN agencies and relevant partner agencies. It responds to the urgent need for environment-related technology support and capacity building measures in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It provides for an expansion of national-level UNEP activities through collaboration with partners. Through the Bali Strategic Plan, COBSEA could mobilize financial resources to implement its capacity building activities. Technology transfer between countries can be used as an effective mechanism to enhance capacities among the COBSEA member countries. One of the primary mechanisms for implementation of the Bali Strategic Plan is South-South Cooperation, which includes knowledge and technology transfer between developing countries. Through its capacity building strategy, COBSEA can act as a mechanism to enhance both North-South and South-South Cooperation within the East Asian Seas region.

45. The work plan for operationalizing the strategy on national capacity building may include the following activities:

Activities: Strategy 2. National Capacity Building	Timelines
<p><i>Review the status of implementation of coastal and marine pollution-related MEAs among the COBSEA member countries.</i></p> <p><i>Organize a regional MEA-forum to exchange experiences, identify obstacles to implementation, key areas of synergies between MEAs and specific national capacity building programmes.</i></p> <p><i>Identify and establish national lead agencies for capacity building measures in the identified priority areas.</i></p> <p><i>Mobilize financial support and provide technical assistance to the COBSEA member countries as per the developed national capacity building programmes.</i></p>	2 years
<p><i>Develop a framework for national marine environment policy development, building on relevant UNEP and UN experience, for application in other COBSEA member countries.</i></p>	2 years
<p><i>Provide financial and technical support to one pilot country in developing national marine environment policies.</i></p> <p><i>Continue to develop/implement measures such as trainings, exchange of experiences and lessons learned between countries and organizations and preparation of policy guidelines to assist member countries meet their commitments under MEAs and other regional and international agreements and obligations, with a focus on strategic and emerging issues and regional priority areas such as transboundary issues (international waters), habitat protection, pollution management, policy development and public education.</i></p>	5 years

Strategy 3: Strategic and Emerging Issues

46. The overall objective of this strategy is for COBSEA to provide assistance to its member countries in identifying and addressing strategic and emerging issues of priority to the East Asian Seas region, within the thematic areas of the new strategic direction, through increasing awareness and strengthening the capacities among COBSEA member countries in managing such priority issues.

47. Information from various sources, including those from international and regional sources and the CCC, would be used to identify strategic and emerging issues. Such issues could include globally recognized coastal and marine problems not yet adequately addressed in the East Asian Seas region or priority issues specific to the region where little research has so far been undertaken and/or limited management measures have been put in place.

48. COBSEA will organize fora where international experts and representatives from the COBSEA member countries will be given an opportunity to analyze strategic and emerging issues of priority and identify suitable mitigation measures that require action at the regional level. COBSEA will utilize the information that is made available through the CCC to assist member countries in identifying funding opportunities for capacity building measures. Such measures could include research initiatives, identification and implementation of suitable mitigation measures in identified priority areas. When required, COBSEA will also provide technical support to its member countries through the development of guidelines, criteria or standards to address strategic and emerging issues of priority.

49. Under the thematic area of marine- and land-based pollution the strategic and emerging issues include the global issue of marine litter that causes a wide spectrum of environmental, economic, safety and health impacts, and that will be addressed through COBSEA's strategy. Currently, limited information is available among many of the COBSEA member countries regarding the extent of the problem and few management measures have been taken. At present, the secretariat is assured of financial resources to assist COBSEA member countries in addressing this issue.

50. Another emerging issue, under the thematic area of management and response of coastal disasters, highlighted by the series of natural disasters in the region over the past years, concerns the need for improved spatial planning in the coastal zone to address disaster prevention and carry out environmentally sustainable development.

51. There are other examples that could be addressed in the future, depending on the needs and priorities of the COBSEA member countries. These include those related to the potential impact of climate change on coastal and marine habitats in the East Asian Seas region, the mitigation of invasive species and/or other strategic and emerging issues of priority to the COBSEA member countries associated to the thematic areas of management and response of coastal disasters and coastal and marine habitat conservation.

52. The workplan for operationalizing the strategy on strategic and emerging issues may include the following activities:

Activities: Strategy 3. Strategic and Emerging Issues	Timelines
<p><i>Identify the status and potential response measures of identified current strategic and emerging issues (under the thematic areas of marine – and land-based pollution and management and response to coastal disasters) in the East Asian Seas region.</i></p> <p><i>Development of policy guidelines and capacity building programmes to assist member countries to better address these issues through improved management at national and regional levels.</i></p> <p><i>Implement activities to raise awareness on current strategic and emerging issues of priority to the East Asian Seas region.</i></p>	2 years
<p><i>Ongoing identification of the status of strategic and emerging issues and potential response measures in connection to new or recent MEAs.</i></p> <p><i>Development and implementation of national capacity building measures addressing these issues.</i></p>	5 years

Strategy 4: Regional Cooperation

53. The main purpose of the new strategic direction is to further promote close regional cooperation between the member countries of COBSEA. The overall objective of this strategy is to strengthen COBSEA’s collaboration with its regional partners in implementing the new strategic direction and work to prevent any duplication of efforts.

54. In the East Asian Seas region there are a number of intergovernmental and operational programmes that deal with the management of coastal and marine environment. Major regional organizations include APEC, ASEAN, NOWPAP, PEMSEA and the SCS Project. Both COBSEA and ASEAN are intergovernmental groupings that share several member countries. The geographical focus (seas of Southeast Asia and southern part of the People’s Republic of China) for the activities is similar. APEC is another intergovernmental grouping with a more extensive geographical coverage, which includes the East Asian Seas region. NOWPAP is a neighbouring regional seas programme similar to COBSEA that shares two member countries with COBSEA, i.e., the People’s Republic of China and the Republic of Korea.

55. In order to further enhance the benefits from these regional initiatives for the countries in the East Asian Seas region, COBSEA will continue to work closely with these regional groupings and programmes. At the initial stage the COBSEA Secretariat will seek to establish a Memorandum of Understanding or similar, with the intergovernmental marine programmes of ASEAN, building on the long relationship and the previous successful collaboration. At this stage, informal collaboration should also be further strengthened between COBSEA and APEC, NOWPAP, PEMSEA and the SCS Project on priority areas of common interest.

56. In addition, the exact modalities for developing the CCC are dependent on the outcome of negotiations and agreements among all parties in the East Asian Seas region. The secretariat will continue consulting, within the thematic areas, with the respective secretariats of ASEAN, APEC, IOC/WESTPAC, NOWPAP, PEMSEA and the SCS Project and other relevant organizations such as FAO, SEAFDEC and World Fish Centre, on their agreement that COBSEA will provide information from past and ongoing activities in the East Asian Seas region and vice-versa.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

57. ASEAN was initiated as an environmental cooperation programme in 1977 through the formation of the ASEAN Expert Group on Environment under the ASEAN Committee on Science and Technology. In 1989, the expert group was elevated to become the ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN) at the same level as the Committee on Science and Technology. The ASEAN Senior Officials of Environment (ASOEN) meet once a year to consider the reports of its Working Groups and to provide operational policy guidance on the various environmental programmes that are being pursued. As a matter of procedure, ASOEN then submit their recommendations to the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment. The ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment (AWGCME) is implementing the Vientiane Action Programme (2004-2010), where the continued work in implementing the ASEAN Marine Water Quality Criteria and the ASEAN Criteria for Regional and National Marine Protected Areas have been identified as the priority areas for AWGCME.

58. ASEAN and COBSEA's long-term relationship started in 1981, when the five original ASEAN member countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) established COBSEA. ASEAN has achieved a strong political support in implementing the outcomes of regional cooperation while COBSEA, being under the framework of UNEP's Regional Seas Programme, can provide strong technical support. These advantages have previously been optimized through close collaboration between AWGCME and COBSEA through the development of the ASEAN Marine Water Quality Criteria and the ASEAN Criteria for Regional and National Marine Protected Areas. The collaboration resulted in their adoption by the 13th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Yangon, Myanmar in 2003. Furthermore, the outcomes of this collaboration have provided the opportunity for AWGCME to attract funding in order to further enhance the implementation of these criteria.

59. The successful collaborative approach that resulted in the adoption of ASEAN Marine Water Quality Criteria and the ASEAN Criteria for Regional and National Marine Protected Areas should be further explored as a means to strengthen the collaboration between ASEAN and COBSEA and to maximize the strengths and benefits of these two regional bodies in the future. Through the CCC, COBSEA will be able to support AWGCME with information and knowledge management. In addition, COBSEA could provide technical support by developing guidelines, criteria and standards in thematic areas identified under its strategy on strategic and emerging issues that are not currently addressed by the AWGCME. These could then be submitted to the ASOEN and subsequently, to the ASEAN Ministers for adoption. In addition, a formalized means of information exchange between ASEAN and COBSEA would be identified to support the development of the CCC.

Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)

60. APEC was established in 1989 to enhance economic growth in the Asia-Pacific region and to strengthen the Asia-Pacific community. APEC currently includes 21 member economies on both sides of the Pacific and all COBSEA member countries except for Cambodia are also member economies of APEC. Similar to ASEAN, APEC implements its work programme through the meetings of ministers, senior officials and working groups. Currently, the marine-related working groups of APEC (the working groups on marine resources conservation and fisheries)

are guided by the Bali Plan of Action, which was adopted during the 2nd APEC Ocean Related Ministerial Meeting in 2005. The Bali Plan of Action outlines the priority areas of sustainable management of the marine environment and its resources; sustainable economic benefits from the oceans; and the sustainable development of coastal communities. APEC provides funding to its member economies according to project proposals submitted by its members.

61. Future collaboration between COBSEA and APEC could include the potential of COBSEA acting as a sub-regional partner to APEC. The benefits of such an arrangement are manifold. Through the identification of capacity building needs and strategic and emerging issues from the CCC, COBSEA could assist in identifying measures more suitable to be implemented under the APEC framework. APEC would benefit from COBSEA's limited geographical scope and technical expertise in the field of coastal and marine environmental management in the East Asian Seas region, while COBSEA would benefit from the exchange of lessons learned and best practices among the APEC economies. At present, thematic areas where close collaboration between COBSEA and APEC would be of benefit include economic aspects of emerging issues such as the management of marine litter and invasive species and information and knowledge management through the CCC.

Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (IOC/WESTPAC)

62. IOC/WESTPAC is a regional subsidiary body of the IOC responsible for the promotion, development and coordination of marine scientific research programmes. Its activities are primarily aimed at strengthening national capacities in conducting marine scientific research and monitoring programme. All COBSEA member countries are also members of IOC/WESTPAC apart from Cambodia. Technical cooperation between IOC/WESTPAC and COBSEA could include the exchange of oceanographic data and information through the CCC. In addition, COBSEA could benefit from working with the existing expert network of IOC/WESTPAC when identifying and addressing strategic and emerging issues and during the development of state of marine environment reports.

Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP)

63. NOWPAP is a neighbouring Regional Seas Programme, which is also administered by UNEP. NOWPAP has four member countries, two of which are also members of COBSEA (the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea). Considering the similarities between the two action plans, cooperation and information sharing between COBSEA and NOWPAP on common priority areas, such as marine litter and information management, is easily feasible. NOWPAP has established four Regional Activity Centres in the areas of coastal environmental monitoring and assessment, data and information networking, environmental emergency preparedness and response and pollution monitoring. COBSEA will seek closer technical collaboration with NOWPAP also through these Regional Activity Centres.

Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA)

64. PEMSEA was initiated in 1994 as the Regional Programme for Marine Pollution Prevention and Management in the East Asian Seas region. The project was funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and had twelve participating countries, most of which are also members of COBSEA. The first phase of the project was implemented until 1999. During the follow-up phase (1999-2006), PEMSEA increased its focus on addressing environmental management problems in the region through strengthening partnerships with national and local governments as well as international and regional organizations. Through the signing of the "Haikou Partnership Agreement on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA)" at the East Asian Seas Congress in December 2006, PEMSEA is now pursuing a move towards institutionalization.

65. During the implementation of the first two phases of the project, PEMSEA established a strong relationship to local governments in the region. The availability of project funding through GEF has enabled the project to enhance the local-level implementation of integrated coastal management projects across the region. With the advantage of COBSEA's position as a permanent intergovernmental body and its close relationship with its member countries and PEMSEA's expertise in local implementation, COBSEA and PEMSEA have experienced successful collaboration on common priority areas in the past. One such example is the co-organization of the East Asian Seas IGR-2 Preparatory Workshop that resulted in the development of the "Policy Brief: Partnership Opportunities for Enhancing GPA Implementation in the East Asian Seas Region (2007-2011) and the East Asian Seas Forum held at the Second Intergovernmental Review Meeting of the GPA.

66. The "Partnership Operating Arrangements for the Implementation of the Sustainable Strategy for the Seas of East Asia" outlines the participation of different actors in the region under the framework of PEMSEA's "Haikou Partnership Agreement". The East Asian Seas Partnership Council consists of an Executive Committee, an Intergovernmental Session composed of the representatives from the partner countries and a Technical Session composed of representatives of the partner organizations. The technical session will provide recommendations to the Intergovernmental Session that in turn will provide policy guidance, coordination and evaluation of the progress of the implementation of the SDS-SEA. According to the Partnership Operating Arrangements, a Regional Partnership Fund will be set up by the East Asian Seas Partnership Council to collect voluntary financial contributions from countries, international agencies, donors, institutions, individuals and any other entity for the implementation of the SDS-SEA. Similar to COBSEA's East Asian Seas Trust Fund, the depositary of the Regional Partnership Fund will be a sponsoring UN Agency for PEMSEA.

67. Any potential participation of COBSEA in the implementation of the SDS-SEA would, according to PEMSEA's Partnership Operating Arrangements, be limited to the Technical Session of the Partnership Council. Such an arrangement might have implications on COBSEA as an intergovernmental body. As an alternative, the collaboration between COBSEA and PEMSEA could be continued on an ad hoc basis in areas of common interest to the two entities. This can be done effectively without any formal arrangement.

UNEP/GEF Project: "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand" (SCS Project)

68. The SCS Project was initiated by COBSEA in **1996**. Its implementation started in 2002 in the seven COBSEA member countries Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. The SCS Project's main emphasis is on habitat management and rehabilitation. The SCS Project has established an effective institutional mechanism comprising of a project steering committee, task forces and regional and national working groups for the development and implementation of its strategic action programme.

69. The SCS Project will be completed in 2008. In order to sustain the outcomes of the project after completion, a mechanism is being developed for marine environmental cooperation in the South China Sea. A close relationship between COBSEA and any mechanism resulting from the SCS Project would be beneficial in order to maximize the benefits of the SCS Project and to enhance the regional collaboration on the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand. These possibilities will have to be closely evaluated by the SCS Project and COBSEA member countries. COBSEA could assist in the long-term implementation of the outcomes of the SCS Project and provide a coordinating role for the various working groups and committees established by the SCS Project for the implementation of its strategic action programme. Specific activities could also include the further development of the South China Sea meta-database and GIS database.

70. Like in many other Regional Seas Programmes, COBSEA provides the appropriate environmental policy umbrella for the implementation of Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) projects in the East Asian Seas region. A partnership was recently developed in order to link the coastal and oceans activities of UNEP to the LME assessment and management approach of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Under this partnership, 64 LMEs have been identified around the world's coastal margins located within the boundaries of 18 Regional Seas. These LMEs provide operational management units for translating the Regional Seas conventions and action plans into concrete actions. In addition to the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand LMEs that are covered under the SCS Project, other LMEs in the East Asian Seas region include: East China Sea, Indonesian Sea, North Australia, North-Western Australia, Sulu-Celebes Sea and West-Central Australia.

71. The work plan for operationalizing the strategy on regional cooperation may include the following activities:

Activities: Strategy 4. Regional Cooperation	Timelines
<p><i>Identify and agree on suitable formal or informal arrangements for the collaboration between COBSEA and its regional partner organizations in specific areas while implementing the new strategic direction.</i></p> <p><i>Identify mechanisms for collaborating with regional partner organizations in establishing the CCC as a provider of knowledge from past and ongoing activities in the East Asian Seas region.</i></p> <p><i>Development of joint activities on common priority areas between COBSEA and its regional partner organizations, as appropriate.</i></p>	2 years
<p><i>Further development and implementation of joint activities on common priority areas between COBSEA and its regional partner organizations.</i></p>	5 years

GOVERNANCE

72. The 2003 independent review of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, the recommendation of the 17th Meeting of COBSEA in March 2004, the May 2005 Brainstorming Meeting in Bangkok, and the 18th Meeting of COBSEA in January 2006 all agreed in principle that COBSEA's governance structure be fine-tuned to better reflect the proposed new strategic direction for COBSEA. Even though the main features of COBSEA's governance structure will remain the same, some adjustments have been outlined in the following sections, which will be reviewed at appropriate times.

Membership

73. The members of COBSEA currently include the ten countries Australia, Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Membership to COBSEA should be open, in principle, to any country that borders the East Asian Seas region. The secretariat will be empowered to solicit expressions of interest from bordering countries that are currently not members and to take individual cases to COBSEA intergovernmental meetings for its consideration.

Policy Guidance and Coordination

74. The East Asian Seas Action Plan identifies the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and its biennial intergovernmental meetings as its sole decision-making body with the overall authority to determine its content and review its programme of implementation. In accordance with the East Asian Seas Action Plan, COBSEA will continue to make policy decisions concerning all substantive and financial matters related to it.

National Representatives

75. As mandated during the original formation of COBSEA, high-level officials will represent their countries at COBSEA meetings. These high-level officials may well come from environment ministries or agencies, as is the current practice for the National Focal Points (NFPs), but this is an issue for jurisdictions to decide. It is noteworthy in this context that the 1994 "Action Plan for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Region" mentions that national representatives for COBSEA should ideally be the ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment.

76. At every COBSEA meeting, these high-level officials will be invited to report on national activities. The aim is to firmly embed the East Asian Seas Action Plan into national governance and to increase the national ownership of COBSEA and its new strategic direction.

77. Each member country will also endorse, or newly appoint, an organization as well as an appointed individual within that organization, as the designated NFP. The main tasks for the NFPs will continue to include:

- To act as the official channel of communication between the national institutions of their respective governments, COBSEA, the secretariat and UNEP;
- To coordinate, as appropriate, the participation of national institutions in the implementation of COBSEA approved programmes;
- To consult with and provide guidance to the relevant national institutions in connection with the implementation of the COBSEA-approved activities; and
- To collate and represent the results of the COBSEA-approved projects and activities for presentation at the regular meetings of COBSEA.

78. In order to increase the active involvement of member countries in COBSEA meetings and COBSEA activities and to strengthen the national ownership of COBSEA, a COBSEA Chair should be identified at each COBSEA meeting. The Chair would be a high-level official of one of the COBSEA member countries and the chairmanship would last for a period of two years. The COBSEA secretariat would provide all necessary support to the Chair, whose main responsibilities would include:

- Chairing COBSEA Meetings;
- Guiding the preparation of COBSEA Meetings in close collaboration with the COBSEA Secretariat;
- Promoting COBSEA activities at regional and international levels; and
- Providing any other guidance to COBSEA and its secretariat as appropriate.

79. The secretariat is responsible for the general and technical coordination and financial management in implementing the new strategic direction and the East Asian Seas Action Plan. The current EAS/RCU is to be renamed the COBSEA Secretariat. This is a change that links the secretariat clearly to COBSEA and underlines its function to serve the COBSEA. It will also make its role more transparent for outsiders.

80. Pending upon its resources, the secretariat will provide assistance to member countries as required. The permanent staffing at the secretariat currently consists of one coordinator, one programme officer, one administrative assistant and one senior secretary. At its current size, the secretariat will be able to serve COBSEA by:

- Organizing biennial COBSEA Intergovernmental Meetings;
- Managing the East Asian Seas Trust Fund;

- Building and maintaining partner and sponsor networks through the implementation of Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) with partner and sponsor organizations;
- Liaison and networking with national governments, partners and regional bodies;
- Mobilizing external funding for COBSEA approved activities;
- Initiating and managing activities to support the implementation of the new direction for COBSEA;
- Building and maintaining the proposed CCC and the COBSEA website; and
- Maintaining overall quality control over all COBSEA-initiated activities including monitoring and evaluation of all activities, establishment of lessons learned reporting and feedback into programmes/projects.

81. The new strategic direction for COBSEA will necessitate a different and more innovative approach to deliver the work programme and the secretariat may have to outsource some of its tasks. Attachment of officers from member countries for a specific time/task to the secretariat may provide a convenient way to build regional skills, enhance national ownership and deliver programme outcomes efficiently. The secretariat will seek dedicated staff allocations from any donor-funded activities. These “project staff” could be located in the secretariat or work off-site, but with a reporting duty to the secretariat.

82. The possibility of establishing Regional Activity Centres similar to the model followed by NOWPAP will be investigated. These Centres would be national institutions with technical expertise in an area of priority to COBSEA that are willing to expand their areas of work into regional scale. These Centres would also be responsible for any related staffing costs. The cost of COBSEA-related activities would however be mobilized by the secretariat, but could be complemented by voluntary contributions from the participating institutions.

Financial Arrangements

83. Upon the establishment of the East Asian Seas Trust Fund in 1982, the participating countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand) decided on voluntary levels of contribution amounting to a total of USD 86,000 per year. In 1994, when the Action Plan was reviewed and five new member countries (Australia, Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Korea and Viet Nam) joined COBSEA, the total level of contribution increased with USD 42,000. Since 1994, some member countries have increased their contributions while others have decreased, making the total current pledges to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund USD 171,600.

84. The East Asian Seas Trust Fund will continue to be administered by UNEP according to the financial rules of the United Nations and the terms of reference agreed by the participating governments as outlined in the 1994 “Action Plan for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Seas region”. According to the East Asian Seas Action Plan, these arrangements will be subject to review at ad hoc intervals by the participating governments.

85. Since the initiation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, funding from the UNEP Environment Fund and various donors have been major contributors to the implementation of COBSEA approved projects and activities.

86. However, although major projects are funded by donors, such funding cannot cover secretariat costs. Therefore, there is a need for a minimum amount of member country contributions for the smooth running of the secretariat and for its core activities such as coordination and implementation of COBSEA-approved activities, resource mobilization, liaison, networking and quality control.

87. The independent review of the East Asian Seas Action Plan that was conducted in 2003 and tabled at the 17th Meeting of COBSEA recommended a minimum staff structure for the secretariat comprising a P5 level Programme Officer, a P3 level Programme Officer, and two support staff. The subsequent down sizing of the level of staff from D1 and P5 level Programme Officers to P5 and P3 level Programme Officers saved an estimated USD 70,000 per year according to the 2007 salary figures.

88. The need for further increase in contributions from member countries to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund continues to be highlighted regularly.

89. Considering the member countries' difficulties in increasing their contributions at present, COBSEA will continue operation at the current size of the secretariat (see Annex 1) with the present level of member country contributions (see Annex 2), noting that in 2012 the current balance of the Trust Fund would be depleted according to the calculations made in Annex 3. The pledges to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund will be reviewed at the 20th Meeting of COBSEA.

90. The secretariat will continue discussions with: (1) member countries regarding increasing and differentiated voluntary contributions, including in kind; and (2) donor countries and international organizations on continued support to COBSEA; and provide detailed proposals to the 20th and future COBSEA intergovernmental meetings.

Stakeholder Community

91. The private sector and the NGO community in particular have much to offer to regional policy guidelines and coordination processes. The organization of stakeholder fora in connection to COBSEA Meetings and the participation of stakeholders as observers during COBSEA meetings could be used, as appropriate and if approved by COBSEA, as a means to increase the stakeholder involvement in COBSEA activities.

ANNEX 1:
Operating Costs for the COBSEA Secretariat

The following are the estimated costs, expressed in US dollars, of the COBSEA Secretariat at current levels of staffing:

(a) Personnel	
– Coordinator (P5) *	160,300
– Programme Officer (P3) *	114,600
– Administrative Assistant *	45,000
– Senior Secretary *	45,000
– Travel	10,000
(b) Rental	12,000
(c) COBSEA activities	5,000
(d) Expendable	2,100
(e) Reporting	3,000
(f) Communication	3,000
Total	400,000

* Salary scales according to the Standard Salary Costs – Version 10, Applicable to cost station: 4202, Bangkok ESCAP, Thailand, Year 2007.

ANNEX 2:

Current Level of Country Contribution to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund

The following are the current level of contribution of the COBSEA member countries to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund:

<i>Country</i>	<i>US dollars</i>
Australia	20,000
Cambodia	5,000
The People's Republic of China	30,000
Indonesia	20,000
The Republic of Korea	15,000
Malaysia	18,700
Philippines	25,000
Singapore	10,000
Thailand	20,900
Viet Nam	7,000
Total	171,600

ANNEX 3:

Estimated Balance of the East Asian Seas Trust Fund (2007-2013)

The following is the estimated balance of the East Asian Seas Trust Fund during the period 2007-2013 with a maintained level of member country contributions to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund at the current size of the secretariat:

<i>Period</i>	<i>Opening Balance (USD)</i>	<i>Pledges (USD)</i>	<i>Interest * plus miscellaneous income (USD)</i>	<i>Expenditure (USD)</i>	<i>Balance (USD)</i>
2007	1,433,000	171,600	14,330	400,000	1,218,930
2008	1,218,930	171,600	12,189	400,000	1,002,719
2009	1,002,719	171,600	10,027	400,000	784,346
2010	784,346	171,600	7,843	400,000	563,790
2011	563,790	171,600	5,638	400,000	341,028
2012	341,028	171,600	3,410	400,000	116,038
2013	116,038	171,600	1,160	400,000	-111,201

* Level of interest estimated to 1 per cent per year.

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