

## **Summary of informal bilateral consultation between COBSEA Secretariat and COBSEA countries held during April and May 2020**

1. Between mid-April and mid-May 2020 the COBSEA Secretariat convened informal bilateral consultation with each of the nine COBSEA countries through video/teleconferencing. The purpose was to discuss ongoing and upcoming COBSEA activities and take stock of potential COVID-19 implications for activity implementation. This document summarizes the main points raised through these nine bilateral meetings. The agenda is provided in Annex 1, the list of meetings and participants is provided in Annex 2.

### **Business continuity during COVID-19**

2. The COBSEA Secretariat is for most part maintaining normal operations and business continuity while telecommuting full time for the time being. COBSEA Secretariat is subject to guidelines from UNEP and, being hosted in Thailand, from the Government of Thailand. No international travel is currently possible, and no in-person COBSEA meetings will be held during the coming months. Depending on how the situation evolves, in-person meetings may be convened later in the year. Where possible, planned meetings are being held as virtual events. As things stand the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) in the first half of 2021 is expected to be convened in person. UNEP's Law Division has conducted a study on virtual meetings which can inform COBSEA's course of action should formal decision-making meetings need to be convened virtually. Activities planned for 2020 are being modified as necessary, with a view to moving forward implementation to the extent possible.
3. All COBSEA countries have physical distancing measures in place and in many cases this includes telecommuting. Some countries have started returning to office, initially at reduced workforce. COBSEA countries are maintaining mostly good business continuity, especially in relation to desk-based work. In many countries fieldwork and activities requiring public interaction as well as in-country travel continue to be on hold for the time being, and where possible virtual events are held.
4. All countries confirmed they have infrastructure and technical capability to attend virtual meetings, and agreed that virtual meetings are an important modality to use under the current circumstances. Virtual meetings may also in the longer term be possible to use to a greater extent than has previously been the case.

### **COBSEA activities 2020 and COVID contingencies**

#### Marine Litter

5. The COBSEA Secretariat informed countries that two meetings of the Working Group on Marine Litter are planned to take place in 2020. The first meeting is scheduled to be held as a virtual meeting 23-25 June, focusing on a few main topics including development of a draft workplan of the Working Group; reporting and tracking progress of implementation of the RAP MALI; marine litter monitoring; and development of an East Asian Seas Regional Node of marine litter under the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). Further information about meeting arrangements and meeting documents will be shared one month prior to the meeting. Details regarding platform used for the virtual meeting will

be communicated in due time. The second Working Group meeting in 2020 is envisaged to be held in person, based on previous consultation potentially hosted by Cambodia.

6. COBSEA countries expressed support for moving ahead with a virtual meeting of the Working Group in June, bearing in mind that it is a technical meeting and noting the importance of group consultation on items pertaining to implementation of the RAP MALI. One country expressed reservations about convening a formal Working Group meeting using virtual means. As such, an alternative option is to hold an informal technical consultation in June by virtual means, to support planning and preparation for a formal meeting of the Working Group on Marine Litter later in the year.
7. SEA circular project activities, focusing on land-based sources of marine litter, are underway, contributing towards implementation of RAP MALI. Focus of national activities and adjustments needed to existing plans were discussed. This includes support towards national planning and policy development; development of regionally coherent national monitoring programs; conducting hotspot assessments; building capacity including through national trainings; as well as mapping current marine litter research, indicators and methodologies in the region. Discussions are underway on the SEA of Solutions event scheduled to take place in Viet Nam late in the year, and updates on this will be shared in due time. The value in engaging all COBSEA countries in relevant SEA circular activities and leveraging non-target countries as knowledge partners was emphasized. Suggestions were made e.g. in relation to sharing expertise and capacity, which may be pursued by directly engaging institutions and individuals from the region in regional activities, and by organizing events for regional exchange of best practices (with SEA of Solutions providing one possible platform).

#### Marine and Coastal Planning and Management

8. The COBSEA Secretariat provided an overview of two concept notes shared with COBSEA countries at the beginning of April: 'Regional Training and Knowledge Exchange on Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning' and 'Coral Reef Conservation Priorities in East Asian Seas: towards a climate resilient network of Marine Protected Areas'. These respond to priorities in the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022 as well as UNEA resolutions.
9. Regarding activities focusing on marine and coastal spatial planning (MCSP), the Secretariat noted that a regional training workshop will be held later in 2020 in Thailand if the COVID-19 situation allows for it. If circumstance requires arrangements will be made for training and consultation in 2020 using virtual means, with in-person training held 2021. COBSEA National Focal Points will in the near future be invited to nominate suitable candidates for training workshop. A consultant will be hired to carry out a review of national and regional MCSP-related legislative and policy frameworks. Responding to questions raised, the Secretariat clarified that Terms of Reference for the consultant have been drafted and the consultant job opening will, once advertised, be circulated among COBSEA countries, encouraging qualified candidates to apply.
10. Countries noted that the MCSP activity aligns well with identified priorities and needs as defined in the COBSEA Strategic Directions, and constitutes a direct continuation of a COBSEA project previously approved by the IGM.
11. Regarding activities focusing on coral reefs, the Secretariat noted that the workshop tentatively planned for September 2020 would be held in person if possible, otherwise through videoconferencing. A second workshop would be held in 2021. The proposed analysis of conservation priorities towards an MPA network could be initiated as planned, largely carried out as a desk study and using virtual meetings of the envisaged advisory group.

12. Several countries noted that the proposed coral reef activity provides opportunity to advance implementation of the COBSEA Strategic Directions. Some countries noted that, although the project idea had been shared and discussed with COBSEA countries during a workshop in December 2019 in Manila, the Philippines, and that further information had been shared by email in the past months, the proposed activity had not been presented to or endorsed by the IGM.
13. A suggestion was made for the Secretariat to invite National Focal Points to give their consent to proceeding with development and implementation of these activities, by notifying the Secretariat via email. A suggestion was also made to put proposed work on coral reefs on hold until activities have been discussed and agreed in an IGM. A recommendation was made to the Secretariat to, where possible, invite COBSEA countries to submit concept notes and proposals for the implementation of activities.

### **2030 Development Agenda and Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework**

14. The process towards finalization of COBSEA's Outlook on follow-up and review of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals continues as planned. The Outlook is currently being revised based on country input received.
15. While awaiting information on new dates for the 2020 UN Ocean Conference, the Secretariat has prepared two draft Voluntary Commitments, based on COBSEA's mandate, Strategic Directions as well as ongoing project work. Input on these was welcomed, preferably by 22 May 2020. Several countries mentioned they will provide comments on the draft Voluntary Commitments. One country emphasized that the Voluntary Commitments should focus on activities and deliverables that are achievable and that have been agreed by all COBSEA countries. It was clarified that registering Voluntary Commitments would not require any additional funding from COBSEA countries.
16. The COBSEA Secretariat shared information on a series of webinars being planned to discuss the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. The first webinar, to be held 28 May 2020, will focus on UNEP's work with and through Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans in development, implementation and tracking of the Framework. The webinar will provide opportunity to discuss further efforts through COBSEA. Countries welcomed the initiative and expressed interest in participating in the webinar.

### **Any Other Business**

17. The COBSEA Secretariat noted that a request for a Junior Professional Officer (JPO) in the COBSEA Secretariat had been posted on UNEP's JPO portal. The Secretariat encouraged countries providing JPOs to consider supporting a JPO in the COBSEA Secretariat, which would considerably strengthen capacity of the Secretariat and enhance its work with countries.
18. The COBSEA Secretariat informed countries that a single summary note of all bilateral discussions would be prepared and circulated, and that follow up on country-specific matters would be pursued bilaterally.
19. Several countries noted the usefulness of the bilateral calls, and encouraged the COBSEA Secretariat to schedule similar calls again later in the year, as well as to follow up with countries through email.



## **Annex 1. Agenda**

- 1. Opening**  
Introductions; overview of meeting objective and agenda
- 2. Business continuity during COVID-19 - Overview of current situation**  
Updates by the Secretariat  
Updates by Countries
- 3. COBSEA activities 2020 and COVID contingencies**  
Marine litter, including SEA circular project  
Marine and coastal planning and management
- 4. 2030 Development Agenda and Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework**  
Outlook on COBSEA on follow-up and review of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals  
2020 UN Ocean Conference and COBSEA Voluntary Commitments  
Webinar on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
- 5. Any Other Business**

## **Annex 2. Participants and meeting dates**

### **Cambodia – 16 April 2020**

Mr. Kim Nong  
Ministry of Environment  
COBSEA National Focal Point (NFP)

### **People's Republic of China – 8 May 2020**

Ms. Chen Haijun  
Mr. Pei Xiangbin  
Ms. Yulin Fu  
Ms. Chunzi Wang  
Mr. Xiaocheng Wang  
Ms. Guozhi Liu  
Ministry of Ecology and Environment; COBSEA NFP  
Ministry of Ecology and Environment

Mr. Yunjun Yu  
Ms. Naiwen Zhang  
Ms. Fang Wen  
Ms. Siqi Su  
South China Institute of Environmental Sciences

### **Indonesia – 27 April 2020**

Mr. Dida Migfar Ridha  
Ms. Aditya Yuniarti  
Mr. Tedi Prasetyo  
Ministry of Environment and Forestry  
Ministry of Environment and Forestry  
Ministry of Environment and Forestry

### **Republic of Korea – 24 April 2020**

Mr. Changsoo Kim  
Ms. Eun-young Lee  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs; COBSEA NFP  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Ms. Hyung Won Kim  
Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries

Mr. Soomin Song  
Mr. Yunil (Kevin) Kim  
Korea Marine Environment Management Cooperation  
Korea Marine Environment Management Cooperation

### **Malaysia – 10 April 2020**

Mr. Jayaprakash Murulitharan  
Mr. Mohd Husaini Saidi  
Mr. Eddy Mazuaansyah Bin Mohd Ali Murad  
Ministry of Environment and Water (MEWA)

Ms. Jacqueline Chang  
SEA circular consultant

### **Philippines – 11 May 2020**

Ms. Vizminda Osorio  
Ms. Consolacion Crisostomo  
Ms. Perseveranda-Fe J. Otico  
Ms. Michiko Sibunga  
Ms. Likha Alcantara  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources

**Singapore – 20 April 2020**

Ms. Siti Aisyah binte Mohamad Firoz  
Ms. Valerie Chia

Ministry of Environment and Water Resources

Mr. Jeffrey Low  
Ms. Cheo Pei Rong  
Ms. Karenne Tun  
Mr. Jeremy Woon  
Mr. Jeremy Yap  
Ms. Wendy Yap

National Parks Board

**Thailand – 17 April 2020**

Mr. Ukkrit Satapoomin  
Mr. Suwan Nanthasarut  
Ms. Saowalak Winyoonuntakul  
Ms. Sumana Kajonwattanakul  
Ms. Narumol Kornkanitnan  
Mr. Peeraphat Chukamnerd  
Ms. Paweena Srisawetichot

Department of Marine and Coastal Resources,  
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

**Viet Nam – 24 April 2020**

Ms. Nguyen Thank Thao

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Mr. Luu Anh Duc

Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment,  
Vietnam Administration of Seas and Islands (VASI)

Mr Quan Dam

SEA circular consultant

**COBSEA Secretariat**

Mr. Jerker Tamelander  
Ms. Natalie Harms  
Ms. Katrin Eitrem Holmgren  
Ms. Krittika Kleesuwan

COBSEA Coordinator  
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Associate Programme Officer  
COBSEA Programme Assistant