

Third Meeting of the Working Group on Marine Litter of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)

Virtual meeting, 29-30 June 2021

Report of the Third Meeting of the Working Group on
Marine Litter



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The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) is a regional intergovernmental mechanism and one of 18 Regional Seas programmes. It is the decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan, bringing together nine countries – Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Viet Nam – in protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment. COBSEA focuses on marine pollution, ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management, and ocean governance. The COBSEA Secretariat is hosted by Thailand and administered by UNEP. www.cobsea.org

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Introduction

The Third Meeting of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter (WGML) was held on 29-30 June 2021 as a virtual meeting, with participation of Working Group focal points and representatives of COBSEA countries, as well as observers. The purpose of the Meeting was to discuss progress of marine litter activities related to the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI) and further develop substantive issues responding to decisions made by the Twenty-fourth Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM 24) of COBSEA. This report summarizes discussions and input provided at the Meeting, main outcomes and follow up actions.

1. Opening of the meeting

Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, interim COBSEA Coordinator, opened the meeting at 9.00 am (ICT) 29 June 2021. He welcomed all participants and highlighted the importance of the meeting to move forward with the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI). The interim Coordinator requested input to priority issues identified by IGM 24, including finalizing the biennial workplan for implementation of the RAP MALI and Regional Guidance on Harmonized Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes, establishing an Expert Group on Monitoring and finalizing Terms of Reference toward establishing the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the Global Partnership on Marine Litter (GPML). Mr. Pradhan stressed that the meeting aimed to prepare these key issues for consideration and decision at the first part of the Twenty-fifth Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA (IGM 25) to be held 8-9 September 2021 hosted by Viet Nam. COBSEA Secretariat provided an overview of the Meeting agenda (see Annex 1).

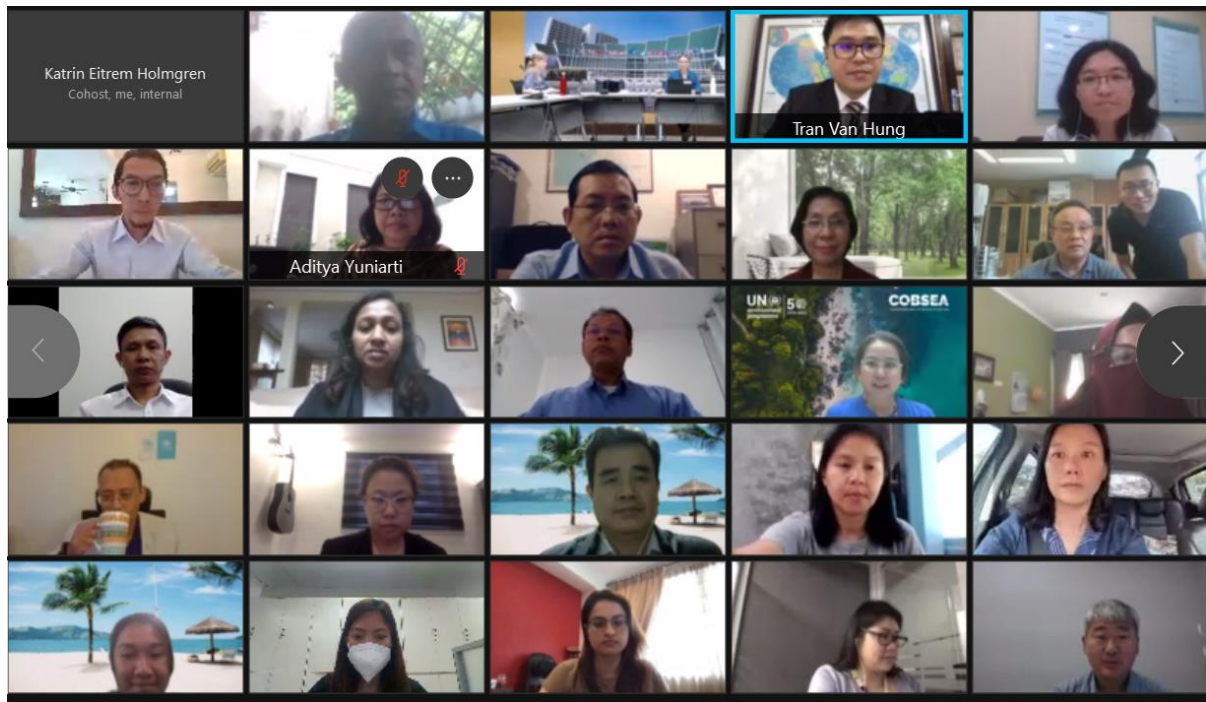
Mr. Anh-Duc Luu from Vietnam Administration of Seas and Islands (VASI), in his capacity as the Working Group focal point of the Government of Viet Nam and representative of the host country of the WGML Meeting and IGM 25, provided opening remarks. He highlighted Viet Nam's efforts to address marine litter, including implementation of the National Action Plan for Ocean Plastic Waste Management, and mentioned the importance of tackling marine litter across stakeholders and at the regional level in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. He invited COBSEA countries to join the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution to be held on 1-2 September 2021, co-convened by Viet Nam, Germany, Ecuador and Ghana.

Brief introductions of meeting attendees were provided by each COBSEA country.

2. Organization of work

In line with the Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Marine Litter, participants were invited to elect a Chairperson and a Rapporteur. As recommended by the Working Group at the Technical Consultation in June 2020, it was suggested that the meeting be chaired by the host country of IGM 25. Mr. Anh-Duc Luu from Viet Nam was elected Chair, supported by Thailand, and the COBSEA Secretariat was appointed to serve as Rapporteur.

The Chairperson noted that the Meeting would take place between 9.00-11.00 ICT and 13.00-15.00 on 29-30 June 2021. COBSEA Secretariat presented meeting documents.



3. Marine litter activities towards achieving the RAP MALI

Updates on regional and global marine litter processes were provided by COBSEA countries and the COBSEA Secretariat.

3.1. Progress updates from participating countries

COBSEA countries provided an update on national marine litter policy and planning progress, ongoing and upcoming policies, priorities, and initiatives. Topics ranged from waste management, water quality, lifecycle management, sea-based sources of marine pollution to microplastics. Multiple countries noted the need to strengthen regional cooperation.

Cambodia presented national legislation and marine litter action, including the 2017 Plastic Management Sub-Decree and plastic bag levy, and ongoing efforts to draft legislation to address and manage plastic use and pollution. Ministry of Environment is currently working with UNEP, COBSEA and Fauna & Flora International under SEA circular and other development partners to strengthen marine litter monitoring and understanding.

China presented ongoing efforts to reduce plastic consumption, including a plastic ban that prohibits restaurants from providing single-use plastic straws, the phase out of non-degradable bags by 2022, and promotion of alternative products such as cloth bags and biodegradable packaging.

Malaysia thanked COBSEA and UNEP for support under the SEA circular project and announced the launch of the Circular Economy Roadmap for plastics in October 2021 and the finalization of the National Marine Litter Roadmap. Malaysia shared ongoing circular economy and awareness raising efforts, including the INSPIRE programme to champion circular business models, efforts to strengthen Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and improve marine litter monitoring building on the Clean Coastal Index.

The Philippines shared an update of marine litter activities, including ongoing rehabilitation in Manila Bay, efforts to strengthen a circular economy, enhance waste recovery and recycling, prevent waste leakage, and reduce maritime sources and riverine inputs of marine litter, as well as outreach campaigns. The representative highlighted the finalization of the National Plan of Action on Marine Litter, in line with the RAP MALI.

Republic of Korea provided an updated on the implementation of the Marine Debris Management Act, which established a management system for marine litter and provided the basis for the first 10-year National Action Plan on Marine Litter launched in May 2021 with the aim to reduce the amount of marine plastic litter by 60 per cent by 2030 and to net zero by 2050. The representative invited COBSEA countries to join the 7th International Marine Debris Conference in September 2022, hosted by Republic of Korea in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and UNEP.

Indonesia shared an update of implementation of the National Plan of Action on Combatting Marine Debris 2018-2025, including strengthened interministerial collaboration, efforts to raise awareness, improve waste management to reduce land-based and sea-based sources of marine litter, and strengthen funding mechanisms, institutions, and law enforcement.

Singapore expressed their commitment to address the transboundary issue of marine litter and called for collective action at the global and regional level. The representative highlighted national legislation and regulations on pollution control and waste management and the pursuit of circular economy approaches under the Zero Waste Masterplan, as well as community engagement efforts.

Thailand presented progress on implementing the Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management 2018-2030 and development of the National Action Plan on Marine Plastic Debris in line with the COBSEA RAP MALI and ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris. The representative highlighted the complementary efforts of departments and agencies to prevent reduce and monitor marine litter and waste leakage upstream and downstream and identified the need to improve laws and regulations and leverage investments for circular economy approaches in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Viet Nam shared an update of ongoing efforts to reduce marine litter, including improved industrial waste management, an export ban of plastic waste, and ambitious targets to reduce marine litter by 75 per cent in 2030, including efforts to address fishing gear and conduct nationwide beach clean ups.

3.2. Update on SEA circular project

Updates on the SEA circular project were provided by Ms. Kamala Ernest, Project Coordinator of SEA circular in the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, and Ms. Natalie Harms, Programme Officer Marine Litter in the COBSEA Secretariat. SEA circular project is implemented jointly by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and COBSEA and contributes fundamentally to the achievement of the COBSEA RAP MALI. The project also supports meetings of the Working Group, technical assistance on marine litter monitoring, and the development of the Regional Node. Detailed information on SEA circular was provided in the 2020 Annual Report (Annex 3 of UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/4).

3.3. Ongoing and proposed activities to implement RAP MALI

COBSEA Secretariat provided information on ongoing and proposed activities related to implementation of the RAP MALI, including new funding opportunities to address regional priority actions (as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/4).

Secretariat highlighted that COBSEA was partially delivering on RAP MALI Actions 1, 3 and 4 including through the SEA circular project (end December 2022), but that additional efforts were recommended to:

- a) strengthen knowledge sharing on good practices of improved waste management and circular economy approaches, including support for additional pilot sites for replication;
- b) continue national and regional training and technical assistance to enhance marine litter monitoring with a view to assessing regional status and trends;
- c) intensify regional knowledge management and networking through development of the Regional Node and organization of regional events in collaboration with partners;
- d) address existing marine litter in the environment as relevant and strengthen legal and economic instruments to prevent and reduce marine litter from sea-based sources.

To strengthen legal instruments on land-based and sea-based sources of marine litter (RAP MALI Actions 1 and 2), UNEP was providing national legislative guidance to COBSEA countries based on Expressions of Interest (Cambodia, Philippines, Malaysia) and was conducting a review of legal frameworks on sea-based sources in the East Asian Seas to inform development of regional activities with guidance from the WGML.

New funding opportunities to address regional priorities and gaps toward implementation of the RAP MALI included support under the umbrella agreement between the US Environmental Protection Agency and UNEP to develop pilot activities to help countries to control, reduce and prevent their land-based sources of solid waste from entering waterways and polluting their coastal and marine environment, including in remote and island communities. Malaysia and Philippines expressed interest in conducting pilot site activities, including solutions in remote communities and islands.

The Secretariat shared information about a project titled 'Marine Litter Prevention through Reduction, Sustainable Design & Recycling of Plastic Packaging' (MA-RE-DESIGN) led by the German Development Cooperation Agency (GIZ) with funding from the Government of Germany under the Zukunft – Umwelt – Gesellschaft (ZUG) initiative. The project aimed to reduce plastic waste leakage through better management and prevention of plastic waste in Thailand and to leverage COBSEA to develop regional capacity and share knowledge on good practices (including on EPR and waste management) and build capacity of COBSEA national focal agencies through training. The project would provide funding for the development of the Regional Node and would strengthen staff capacity of the Secretariat.

An additional funding opportunity to strengthen the Regional Node and regional knowledge sharing was identified through the project 'Promoting Resource Efficiency and Circularity to Reduce Plastic Pollution for Asia and the Pacific' implemented by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with funding from the Global Environment Facility (GEF).

Countries welcomed project development efforts and several countries called for strengthening knowledge sharing at the regional level, including online courses, guidelines, sharing of good practices, and welcomed technical support for replication in pilot sites. Secretariat emphasized that knowledge management and knowledge sharing would be strengthened with funding from ZUG-GIZ and GEF-ADB and that the Regional Node would be instrumental in addressing these issues.

Philippines reiterated their request for a technical expert on monitoring and assessment for marine litter to establish a national baseline and welcomed capacity building efforts. Secretariat highlighted that support could be provided through SEA circular and the MA-RE-DESIGN project, including trainings on monitoring, and the development of the Regional Node. Cambodia expressed similar interest in capacity building.

Malaysia and Thailand called for additional efforts to address abandoned, lost and otherwise discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) in line with RAP MALI Action 2.

Malaysia further welcomed Republic of Korea's previous proposal for the development of a regional report on marine litter response options and showed interest in support for assessing and supporting country readiness related to global response options, including a possible international agreement.

Countries thanked the Secretariat for presented project development efforts in line with IGM 24 resolution and encouraged the Secretariat to pursue presented funding opportunities further, for inclusion in the biennial workplan.

3.4. Marine litter activities toward achieving the RAP MALI

The COBSEA Secretariat presented the revised draft biennial workplan for the implementation of the COBSEA RAP MALI and requested input on identified activities and funding sources, as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/4.

Secretariat highlighted that the workplan format was structured along the four main actions of the RAP MALI corresponding to the list of key actions contained in Appendix 2 of RAP MALI, as per IGM 24 resolution. The workplan focuses on activities COBSEA participating countries will collectively pursue because they are regional in nature or require coherent national efforts and includes ongoing and planned activities for 2021-2022 that are achievable using existing resources or where additional funding sources have been identified. Further, the draft workplan format enables tracking of progress as the basis for regular progress reporting.

Cambodia welcomed the biennial workplan which adequately addressed national needs and voiced interest in strengthening marine litter education and capacity building.

Singapore noted that duplication of progress reporting efforts should be minimized by aligning reporting efforts related to the ad hoc open-ended expert group on marine litter and microplastics (AHEG) and the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA). Secretariat suggested sharing the draft reporting format to track national progress toward implementation of RAP MALI that was discussed at the Technical Consultation of the WGML as an information document for IGM 25 to invite further written input and finalize the reporting progress at the Fourth Meeting of the WGML 4 in preparation of IGM 25 part two.

Malaysia expressed support for the biennial workplan as presented and welcomed activities under Action 1.1, 1.2, 4.3 and 4.5 to support circular economy approaches and engage the private sector, including on EPR, and to replicate good practices and strengthen knowledge sharing, including on new technologies. Malaysia offered to share an island solution toolkit developed with the World Bank to support pilot activities. The representative expressed the need to measure the reduction of marine litter at national and regional level as presented under Action 3.2.

Secretariat highlighted that these activities were covered under Action 1 and 4 of the workplan and would be implemented through the SEA circular project as well as the MA-RE-DESIGN project and cooperation with partners such as ADB and GIZ with complementary expertise in this area. Additional pilot sites to replicate good practices would be conducted with funding from the UNEPA-UNEP umbrella agreement, including in island settings.

Malaysia and Thailand acknowledged the need to address sea-based sources of marine litter and proposed adding an activity under Action 2.2 to explore development of pilot or project

activities related to address ALDFG and/or assessment of impacts on the coastal environment, in partnership with the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and to identify funding accordingly. The Secretariat noted the request for inclusion in the workplan.

Indonesia welcomed the workplan which adequately addressed their needs and would discuss implementation of activities in more detail across work units. The representative highlighted ongoing monitoring efforts and marine litter activities across provinces that could be shared and replicated in line with the workplan.

Countries welcomed the revised draft biennial workplan and presented activities, and encouraged the Secretariat to pursue presented funding sources to facilitate effective implementation and ensure Secretariat capacity. The WGML voiced support to finalize the workplan based on input provided toward adoption by IGM 25 part one on 8-9 September 2021.

4. Marine litter monitoring

4.1. Regional guidance on harmonized marine litter monitoring

Ms. Natalie Harms and Dr. Denise Hardesty from the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) presented the revised draft Regional Guidance on Harmonized Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes, including the regional monitoring inventory, as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/5.

Secretariat emphasized that marine litter monitoring was being pursued based on nationally identified priorities and needs, and with consideration of national context, and that harmonization of national marine litter monitoring programmes does not entail establishing identical monitoring programmes across all countries. The Regional Guidance outlined how harmonization and better data comparability could be pursued through definition of specific common objectives addressed through national monitoring programmes, as well as common core indicators, associated recommended methods and data standards identified and agreed at regional level, in line with existing international guidance. The document had been prepared based on country inputs to a regional monitoring inventory to respond to existing monitoring efforts and capacities in participating countries and provide targeted recommendations for monitoring methods, data standards and core objectives to strengthen national monitoring programmes. To increase synergies, COBSEA Guidance could be leveraged for similar efforts under the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Action Plan on Marine Debris, bearing in mind overlap in country composition.

Secretariat highlighted that capacity building and training for marine litter monitoring would be provided to apply the Guidance and strengthen national monitoring efforts, including technical assistance for development of national baselines and exploring the development of regional assessment of status and trends. An Expert Group on Monitoring would provide input and advice on related monitoring activities.

CSIRO presented the draft document, including a review of monitoring, survey designs and methodologies for sampling in different habitats; the inventory of monitoring efforts in COBSEA countries; and recommendations for harmonizing marine litter monitoring. The document identified five tenets toward establishing baselines and monitoring changes through time:

1. Use of clearly delineated and repeatable methods;
2. Quantification and reporting findings in a way that is harmonized with other surveys and uses policy-relevant categories, as best possible;
3. Representative capture of variation within each habitat to avoid sampling bias;
4. Account for/report sampling/data collection effort;

5. Ensure appropriate representation of habitats.

CSIRO elaborated that the document identified recommendations for strengthening monitoring efforts based on country inputs, capacities and priorities, including to increase surveys of biota, and consider using biota and wildlife sampling as indicators of ecosystem health; to adopt/expand already existing programmes along the five tenets; and to ensure high quality data capture and consistent reporting.

Malaysia welcomed the Regional Guidance and acknowledged that efforts needed to speak to national priorities and build on existing monitoring activities and established methodologies such as coastal cleanups. The representative noted that coastal cleanups not only provided scientific data, but increased awareness, and that aspects of user friendliness and practicality were important to consider.

Secretariat noted Malaysia's input and CSIRO highlighted that the Regional Guidance made recommendations on how to strengthen marine litter monitoring programmes building on existing efforts and that coastal cleanup efforts could be the foundation and could be further improved to make data more comparable and useful. The Guidance recognized the strong value of citizen science to collect reliable robust data and provided simple recommendations to ensure consistency and robustness in data collection and improve inter-comparability as well as change behaviour over time and engage communities.

Prof. Daoji Li from East China Normal University welcomed the Regional Guidance and thanked COBSEA and CSIRO for their effort. He emphasized the importance of harmonizing regional marine litter monitoring methods and standard to facilitate comparative analysis of data across studies and promote cooperation and exchanges in this field. He acknowledged that the document had improved greatly based on country inputs and comments provided at webinars. He suggested that the document further reference existing monitoring guidelines addressing monitoring of sea water, beaches, sediments, and other environments, and for microplastics and large marine litter. He suggested further small adjustments and offered to provide additional information to include further marine litter monitoring programmes efforts in China in the monitoring inventory.

Secretariat and CSIRO welcomed Prof. Li's input and noted that any additional country input would be included.

Countries welcomed the revised draft Regional Guidance and encouraged its finalization based on inputs provided toward adoption by IGM 25 part one on 8-9 September 2021.

4.2. Establishment of the Marine Litter Monitoring Expert Group

COBSEA Secretariat presented the revised draft Terms of Reference for the Marine Litter Monitoring Expert Group, as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/6.

Secretariat highlighted that the Marine Litter Monitoring Expert Group is established by the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter, to provide scientific and technical expertise and advice in support of the development of harmonized national marine litter monitoring programmes tied to the WGML. Experts would be nominated by COBSEA National Focal Points based on their academic qualifications, expertise, and experience in relation to marine litter monitoring and assessment, including related to national marine litter monitoring programmes, monitoring and assessment methods and sample processing, data management, quality assurance and quality control, or other scientific/technical expertise.

Viet Nam highlighted that an Expert Group would provide support for marine litter action and governance and apply the Regional Guidance and welcomed the establishment and identification of activities related to monitoring to support marine litter management. Thailand asked for clarification whether experts nominated by countries could include both scientific and political or other experts on monitoring.

Secretariat clarified that the Secretariat would invite National Focal Points to nominate experts based on their qualifications and expertise, including scientists or practitioners or experts on monitoring programmes.

The Chair invited countries to vote on the establishment of the Expert Group on Monitoring under the Working Group on Marine Litter, based on country consensus.

Representatives of all COBSEA countries welcomed and agreed to establish the Expert Group and invited the Secretariat to contact National Focal Points for nominations. The Chair declared the establishment of the Expert Group on Monitoring by the Working Group on Marine Litter, as per Terms of Reference contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/6.

5. Development of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML

COBSEA Secretariat presented the updated Terms of Reference to guide the development of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML, as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 3/7. It was noted that the Regional Node provides a regional marine litter knowledge management and networking mechanism to support implementation of RAP MALI. The Node would further promote development and implementation of GPML at regional level. Ms. Harms explained the proposed functions of the Node which includes three pillars on (1) marine litter policy and management; (2) marine litter science; and (3) marine litter capacity building. Ms. Eitrem Holmgren presented proposed activities including potential partners and funding streams as well as different hosting arrangements. The Node is proposed to be established and developing using existing and identified project funding, as well as GPML support to develop further funding opportunities, and support for maintenance and operation through (co-)host institutions. COBSEA Secretariat emphasized that the Regional Node would be sustainably financed and not incur any costs to the Trust Fund. Secretariat thanked Indonesia for offering to explore the role of Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a host institution for the Node.

Ms. Aditya Yunarti from the Ministry of Environment and Forestry of Indonesia provided an update of activities under the RC3S, including past and upcoming activities to organize trainings, webinars, coastal cleanups and workshops, and address pollution leakage from rivers. The mandate of the RC3S aligned well with the goals of the GPML and functions of the Regional Node. Activities include establishing a knowledge management platform; creating a hub for solutions to marine pollution from land-based activities; and strengthening capacity building efforts.

Malaysia emphasized the importance of the Regional Node for knowledge sharing and asked for clarification of the role of the Secretariat and the need for a separate entity to host the Node. Malaysia acknowledged the resources identified that are needed to operationalise the Node in the longer term. The representative suggested that the Node address both land-based and sea-based sources of marine litter, in line with RAP MALI and the biennial workplan, and asked whether RC3S could accommodate this focus. Malaysia invited the Secretariat to continue technical discussions with Indonesia to develop hosting arrangements, organizational structure, and a financial plan for hosting.

Secretariat noted Malaysia's suggestions and clarified that existing Regional Nodes were hosted by regional organizations hosted by a member country with the relevant mandate and capacity to lead activities in close collaboration with Regional Coordinating Units and the WGML. This would allow for a strong institutional set-up as part of the COBSEA regional mechanism complementary to the role and capacity of the Secretariat. Resources for the immediate establishment as well as development and maintenance of the Node had been identified and further support for long term financial stability would be provided by the GPML, similar to existing Nodes.

Responding to Malaysia's question whether hosting arrangements needed to be decided upon now and made explicit in the Terms of Reference, the Secretariat clarified that the Terms of Reference identified different hosting options and could be adopted by the IGM in its current form as the basis for development of detailed hosting arrangements.

Malaysia voiced strong support for the current Terms of Reference and indicated preference for an interim hosting arrangement involving the COBSEA Secretariat until (co-)hosting agreements had been deliberated and decided upon following the establishment of the Regional Node. Singapore also echoed support for an interim hosting arrangement involving the COBSEA Secretariat.

Secretariat noted inputs and emphasized that any further written input following the Meeting would be noted accordingly.

COBSEA countries had no further comments on the Terms of Reference and voiced support for the adoption of the current Terms of Reference by IGM 25 part 1 on 8-9 September 2021 toward establishing the Regional Node.

6. Update on regional and global marine litter processes

6.1. Strengthening coordination with ASEAN

Mr. Supawat Kanatireklap of DMCR Thailand presented the ASEAN Regional Action Plan for Combating Marine Debris (ASEAN RAP¹) launched in May 2021 with support from the World Bank. The ASEAN RAP aimed to enhance coordination at the regional and international levels for achieving sustainable management of coastal and marine environments to respond to marine plastic pollution. Components include policy support and planning; research, innovation, and capacity building; private sector engagement; and public awareness and education. He noted that the World Bank was currently finalizing a toolbox on regional harmonized methods and tools for measuring plastic pollution.

COBSEA Secretariat presented possible areas for strengthening COBSEA-ASEAN coordination on marine litter in line with both regional action plans, including technical assistance and capacity building on marine litter management and monitoring; regional knowledge management and networking on marine litter; and communication and visibility of ASEAN and COBSEA efforts and events. Working and communication mechanism included participating in ASEAN and COBSEA Working Group meetings; regular Secretariat to Secretariat exchange through marine litter focal points; as well as exploring agreements and/or letters of exchange including with implementing partners.

¹ The ASEAN RAP is available at https://asean.org/?static_post=asean-regional-action-plan-combating-marine-debris-asean-member-states-2021-2025-3

Thailand emphasized the need to identify existing institutional structures, mandates and funding in ASEAN and COBSEA that are needed for implementation and to identify gaps and overlaps where coordination is needed to avoid duplication. ASEAN, for instance, had a stronger mandate on economic issues that could be leveraged to develop regional standards for plastic packaging and labelling across the wider ASEAN + 3 region. Knowledge sharing could include identifying and promoting best practices for waste management from COBSEA and other partners like ADB, GIZ, and the Basel Convention Regional Centre. Thailand agreed with the working and communication mechanism proposed.

China highlighted the importance of communication and coordination along action plans to guide and encourage member countries to develop national initiatives and plans, and support capacity building, education and assessment of marine litter status and trends.

Secretariat noted input and proposed to reach out to ASEAN Secretariat to share issues discussed during WGML, and to start consultations to strengthen coordination in collaboration with the WGML.

The WGML welcomed efforts to strengthen coordination between COBSEA and ASEAN.

6.2. Updates from the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific

Basel Convention Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific and representative of the Secretariat of the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm Conventions (BRS) shared ongoing efforts and pilot activities as opportunities to replicate good practices in the East Asian Seas region. This included plastic waste projects and support through the Basel Convention Plastic Waste Partnership. Mr. Anton Purnomo from the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Southeast Asia and Ms. Susan Wingfield from the BRS Secretariat mentioned that pilot activities and the Small Grants Programme would be expanded in future. Currently, 23 pilot projects were identified, many for implementation in South-East Asia. They encouraged interested parties to join Plastic Waste Partnership and participate in the work of project groups.

Cambodia shared information on related activities on plastic management toward implementing international agreements and welcomed efforts through the Basel Convention.

Malaysia expressed appreciation for the presentation and asked for more information on regional level implementation of the plastic waste amendment and how the Plastic Waste Partnership differed from a potential new legally binding agreement at global level.

BRS Secretariat clarified that the Basel Convention plastic waste amendment entered into force in 2021 and that it was too early to analyse results of the amendment, although information was being gathered. Regarding a possible global agreement, the BRS had an important role to play, but the Partnership was a complementary initiative.

Thailand asked how countries in the region were coping with non-reusable plastic packaging and medical waste generated during the COVID 19 pandemic.

BRS Secretariat and Regional Centre acknowledged the rise in plastic waste due to COVID and that a recent assessment had seen a spike in non-reusable plastic. BRS Secretariat was developing guidelines on how to reduce plastic waste as result of the pandemic.

Secretariat thanked colleagues for their input and highlighted that COBSEA would continue sharing knowledge and coordinating with BRS Secretariat and the Regional Centre.

6.3. Global marine litter processes

Ms. Heidi Savelli from UNEP presented an update of global marine litter processes. She highlighted that the GPML supports implementation of relevant UNEA resolutions and strives to reduce the leakage of plastics into the ocean through improved design, encouraging closed-loop systems and minimizing waste generation. The Partnership aimed to implement legal, policy and institutional frameworks related to marine litter. Ms Savelli offered GPML support towards the establishment of the East Asian Seas Regional Node on marine litter. She presented work on emerging issues which included engaging businesses and investigating liability of marine litter impacts. Ongoing work entailed supporting national source inventories pilots to guide action plan development of the 12 Regional Seas programmes and action plans on marine litter. Informal and formal processes towards UNEA-5.2 included the Ministerial Conference on Marine Litter and Plastic Pollution.

Malaysia emphasized that any discussion of a possible global agreement should consider existing instruments and any potential gaps. Malaysia voiced interest in receiving support to assist participating countries to assess readiness and capacity to implement existing agreements such as the Basel Convention amendment and global response options.

Ms. Savelli welcomed any expressions of interest from COBSEA countries to receive support through the GPML related to e.g., readiness for global response options.

7. Any other business and remaining agenda items

No further input was provided from countries on remaining agenda items. No further business items were raised.

8. Closing of the meeting

Summary

The COBSEA Secretariat presented a summary of discussions and proposed follow-up steps as well as a timeline for the Meeting report and inputs to documents by agenda item.

Agenda item 3: Marine litter activities towards achieving the RAP MALI

- Updates on national progress and on SEA circular
- New funding/project development presented to implement RAP MALI
- WGML recommends the Secretariat pursue funding/project development further
- Countries voiced interest in exploring pilot site activities (USEPA-UNEP)
- Countries welcomed revised biennial workplan
- Duplication of reporting burdens to be avoided, draft progress reporting format can be shared as information document to IGM 25 for further development
- Proposal to add activity on ALDFG and removal of marine litter in the environment and explore funding/project options
- Encourage activity on measuring reduction, status and trends of marine litter in the region
- Countries welcomed activities related to preventing plastic pollution through CE approach and knowledge sharing on new technologies and good practices (new funding identified)

Agenda item 4: Marine litter monitoring

- Countries welcome Regional Guidance and capacity building opportunities

- Regional Guidance to make recommendations on how to strengthen/build on existing monitoring efforts (e.g., coastal cleanup) taking into consideration user friendliness, practicality, and scientific data collection
- Countries to provide any additional information on monitoring efforts for completion
- WGML established Expert Group on Monitoring
- Secretariat will invite national focal points to nominate experts with appropriate expertise

Agenda item 5: Development of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML

- Countries welcome revised Regional Node Terms of Reference for consideration by IGM 25
- Preference voiced for interim hosting arrangement including Secretariat
- Propose to further discuss and develop hosting agreement(s), organizational structure and financial plan with RC3S/Indonesia based on Terms of Reference
- Regional Node should address marine litter holistically, including sea-based sources in line with RAP MALI

Agenda item 6: Update on regional and global marine litter processes

- Countries welcome strengthening coordination with ASEAN in line with both RAPs
- Secretariat encouraged to coordinate further with ASEC and WGML
- Update on BRS and Regional Centre including pilot activities and Plastic Waste Partnership
- Countries are invited to join Plastic Waste Partnership
- Update on global and regional marine litter processes, including on possible global response options and related country-led initiatives, Secretariat shares information
- UNEP update on progress since AHEG at UNEA-5, Global Partnership on Marine Litter
- GPML will explore support options to the region to assess country readiness and capacity for global response options and implementation of existing agreements
- COBSEA Secretariat will continue coordination with regional and global partners for knowledge sharing

The Secretariat and Chairperson requested the WGML to provide any additional written input to meeting documents by 12 July 2021 after which the COBSEA Secretariat would revise documents based on input received. The Secretariat would circulate the draft Meeting report for review by 16 July 2021 with the deadline for participating countries to provide input by 23 July 2021. Revised meeting documents would be shared with countries at least six weeks prior to IGM 25 or earlier.

4th Meeting of the WGML

In line with discussions at the Technical Consultation in June 2020, it was proposed that the Fourth Meeting of the WGML be held in-person in Viet Nam prior to the second part of the Twenty-fifth Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA as soon as possible in 2022. Viet Nam offered to continue as Chairperson of the Working Group for the Fourth Meeting of the WGML prior to IGM 25 in Viet Nam.

Closing remarks

In his closing remarks, the interim COBSEA Coordinator highlighted the importance of the WGML to guide implementation of the RAP MALI and thanked countries for their input toward finalizing the biennial workplan, Regional Guidance on Harmonized Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes, and the Terms of Reference of the Regional Node of the GPML. He congratulated countries on establishing the Expert Group on Monitoring and thanked the Chairperson and Viet Nam for leading the Meeting. He highlighted that over 50 representatives from nine countries had attended and actively engaged in the Meeting and thanked observers and partners

including from the Embassy of Sweden, BRS Secretariat and Regional Centre, and GPML, as well as the COBSEA Secretariat team.

The Chairperson expressed his thanks to participating countries and the Secretariat and closed the Meeting.

Annex 1: Agenda of the Third Meeting of the COBSEA WGML

1. Opening of the Meeting
2. Organization of work
3. Marine litter activities toward achieving the RAP MALI
 - 3.1. Progress update on national marine litter action from participating countries
 - 3.2. Update on SEA circular project
 - 3.3. Ongoing and proposed activities on marine litter
 - 3.4. Developing the biennial workplan for RAP MALI implementation
4. Marine litter monitoring
 - 4.1. Regional guidance on harmonized marine litter monitoring
 - 4.2. Establishment of a Marine Litter Monitoring Expert Group
5. Development of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML
6. Update on regional and global marine litter processes
 - 6.1. Strengthening coordination with ASEAN
 - 6.2. Basel Convention Regional Centre for Asia and the Pacific
 - 6.3. Global marine litter processes
7. Any other business
8. Closing of the Meeting

Schedule

Time (ICT)	Day 1	Day 2
08:45	Log in, introduction to functions of the platform	Log in
09:00-11:00	Agenda items 1, 2 and 3	Agenda item 5 and 6
12:45	Log in	Log in
13:00-15:00	Agenda items 3 and 4	Agenda items 6, 7 and 8

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