COBSEA

COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA

Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework

- DRAFT for consultations

Executive Summary

The Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework aims to integrate and harmonize all programmes, projects, and activities that were and are proposed to be implemented in the East Asian Seas by COBSEA in relation to all matters related to the conservation and governance of the marine and coastal environments. The contents of the framework are based on previous COBSEA projects, international frameworks and practices, studies commissioned by COBSEA, and consultations with experts in the field, in particular, selected practitioners from COBSEA participating countries. The actions included in the framework are designed to complement each other.

COBSEA's Marine and Coastal Ecosystems activities shall be guided by a proposed Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems. The Working Group will be composed of nominated experts from all COBSEA participating countries who have direct working responsibilities on the topic and would be able to provide advice on the direction and activities, not only for their respective countries, but also for the region.

COBSEA is focusing on four thematic areas for the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems: Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning, Marine Protected Areas and Network, Marine and Coastal Habitats, and Cross-Cutting Mechanisms. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning refers to identifying and planning the use of a marine and coastal space, whether it's for conservation purposes, fisheries, tourism, and other marine industrial activities. The establishment and management of Marine Protected Areas and MPA Networks is the primary conservation mechanism implemented on vital ecosystems. Marine and Coastal Habitats include monitoring, restoration, and rehabilitation activities on coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, and other coastal ecosystems. Finally, Cross-Cutting Mechanisms are the activities that are implemented across the three other thematic areas. This can include activities on blue economy, blue carbon, community participation, data management, and community of practice.

The framework is a working document that provides opportunity for continuous improvement that shall capture innovations and priorities in the governance of marine and coastal ecosystems that can be incorporated in COBSEA. It provides a more cohesive approach in undertaking relevant tasks to ensure that they are logical, appropriate, and relevant.

List of Acronyms

ACB	ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
EAS	East Asian Seas
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GEMS	Global Environment Monitoring System
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
IUCN	International Union on the Conservation of Nature
MCE	Marine and Coastal Ecosystems
MCSP	Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
NFP	National Focal Points
OECM	Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measure
RAC	Regional Activity Centres
SBE	Sustainable Blue Economy
SCS SAP	Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
SD	Strategic Directions
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNEP – WCMC	UNEP - World Conservation Monitoring Centre
WG	Working Group

Contents

1. Overview

This working framework consolidates concepts, proposals, and ideas to bolster efforts on the marine and coastal ecosystem in the East Asian Seas (EAS) for the coming years. The contents are based on recommendations and proposed actions from previous COBSEA projects, COBSEA studies and reports, UNEP guidelines and initiatives on the marine environment, and successes by other Regional Seas. Furthermore, the ideas herein are guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), UNEP Regional Seas Strategic Directions and Core Indicators, COBSEA Strategic Directions, and the draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The programme title, Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, attempts to simplify while capturing all relevant concerns on the protection, management, and overall conservation of the marine environment. Work on the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems incorporates the entire range of the socioecological system[1] including marine biodiversity, coastal ecosystem, blue economy, livelihood of coastal communities, as well as the governance structures in place, planning and development to ensure a comprehensive framework. In the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022, this area of work fell under Marine and Coastal Planning and Management which is quite a lengthy term and also restrictive on the types of activities that fall under the work. The Regional Seas Strategic Directions does not provide such a title but uses a broader term: Marine and Coastal Ecosystems. UNEP simply calls this Marine and Coastal Strategy. For brevity, Marine and Coastal Ecosystems is shortened to MCE in this document.

1.1 Goals and Objectives of the COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework

The overall goal of the COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework is to integrate and harmonize all efforts of COBSEA in relation to the marine and coastal ecosystems which will ensure a cohesive and strategic approach when developing and implementing relevant activities to address Sustainable Development Goal 14.2 and 14.5. The specific objectives of the COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework are to:

- Strengthen the conservation and governance of the marine and coastal ecosystems in the East Asian Seas;
- Ensure alignment of COBSEA activities on the marine and coastal ecosystems with international and regional targets;
- Address specific needs of each participating country and provide tailor-made solutions by ensuring the representation of all COBSEA countries in decision-making and implementation; and,
- Provide guidance on the marine and coastal ecosystems activities and how these are connected amongst each other.

1.2 Summary of Relevant Frameworks and Strategies

The draft COBSEA SDG Outlook document provided an overview of relevant SDG 14 Indicators, how it connects with the Regional Seas Core Indicators alongside COBSEA efforts to address the same indicators through the Strategic Directions 2018-2022. The COBSEA Action Plan 1994 laid out the clear activities that COBSEA is intended to do in the East Asian Seas. The new Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022 – 2025 identified specific goals and targets that the Regional Seas must follow. There is also the Marine and Coastal Strategy for UNEP 2020-

[1] Socioecological systems is a framework developed by Ostrom (2007) that analyzes and utilizes the multi-scalar and spatiotemporal dimensions of an ecosystem with the aim of achieving a balance in the human-nature dynamics of a space. It examines the variables that make up a space, such as the actors (in this case the communities), the resources they need from which ecosystem, and the existing governance system, both inherent and tangible.

2030 which laid out several strategic objectives towards restoring and protecting the marine and coastal ecosystems. Finally, UNEP and therefore COBSEA, is guided by the Medium-Term Strategy to address the triple planetary crises of climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste. Annex 1 summarizes these different frameworks and strategies and their relationship with each other.

1.3 Previous Efforts on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

COBSEA has made considerable strides in managing projects and initiatives related to Marine and Coastal Ecosystems throughout the decades. Notable projects and studies that were implemented and conducted across the region included the following efforts that are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of Previous COBSEA Efforts.

Year	Theme	Project Title and Funding Source	Outcome
2002-2003	Coral Reef	UNEP/ICRAN Small Grants Fund	• 9 small projects across different countries • Monitoring Coral Reefs • Community-Based Monitoring and Management of Coral Reefs
2004-2009	Coral Reef	Green Fins	Improving code of conduct of scuba diving facilities. Coordination teams formed. Adopt a Reef, Monitoring using Reef Watch, Educational Materials Guidelines and Booklets
~~	Coral Reef	ICRAN Demonstration	Exchange information between well-managed MPAs and MPAs that need to improve management
2010-2013	MCSP, Climate Change	SIDA Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone - Disaster Prevention and Sustainable Development	Guidelines: Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone of the East Asian Seas Region: Integrating Emerging Issues and Modern Management Approaches Core set of MCSP trainers in 6 countries
2019-2020	Cross-Cutting	COBSEA Outlook on Ocean-Related SDG	Draft report and a series of workshops on the theme.
2020-2021	MCSP	Blue Solutions MCSP Trainings	More than 40 of government officials trained in 9 COBSEA countries.
2021	MCSP	Blue Solutions MCSP Policy Review	Draft report on Marine and Costal Spatial Planning Policy in the East Asian Seas
2022	MPA	MPA Situational Analysis	Draft report on Situational Analysis of MPAs in East Asian Seas 2022

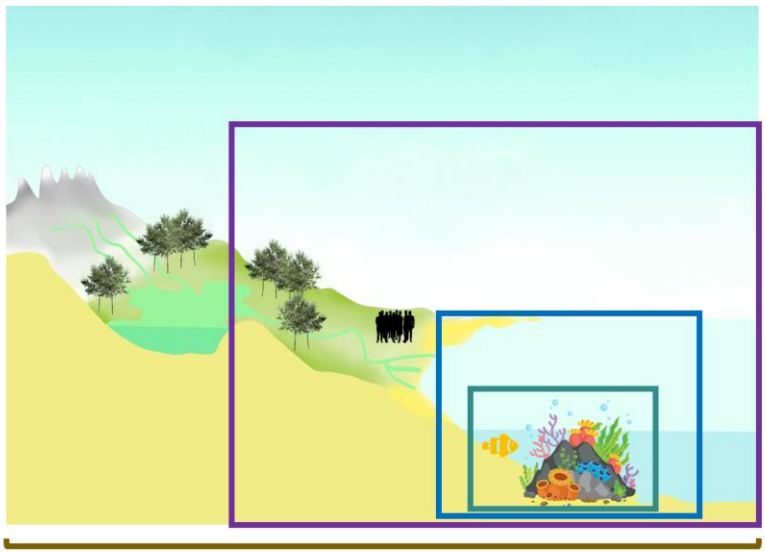
More information on these efforts can be found in Annex 2.

1.4 Scope of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework

The work of COBSEA in Marine and Coastal Ecosystems can be summarized into several themes: marine and coastal spatial planning (MCSP), marine protected areas (MPA), coral reefs, alongside a set of cross-cutting themes. The clear linkages between these thematic areas of COBSEA's work are demonstrated in Figure 1 below. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning provides an overview of the scale and scope of work in the marine and coastal

ecosystem of the East Asian Seas. In a properly defined marine spatial plan, areas for protection across different habitats are clearly identified.

Based on the review of the different efforts listed at Section 1.2 above, Figure 1 also provides an overview of the recommendations that were identified in the reports of the previous projects. Mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetlands are an added thematic area that COBSEA has not fully explored in previous activities but are important ecosystems for conservation due to their services and value for both nature and people. Following these recommendations and the activities that COBSEA already undertake in more established areas of work (such as on Marine Litter), the next sections discuss the proposed streams that COBSEA must undertake in order to effectively bolster the efforts in conserving the marine environment. It should be noted that the success of these recommended efforts also depends on the continuous efforts of other areas that impact the marine environment, such as on marine litter and nutrient pollution.



Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning

- Regional network on MCSP
- Pilot demonstration at local level
- Institutionalization of MCSP
- Team of national instructors
- Transboundary and regional collaboration
- Vertical and horizontal integration
- Cooperation platform
- Regional guidance for EBA
- Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning Project
- Blue Economy

Marine Protected Areas

- COBSEA Regional MPA Network Establishment
  - Expert Working Group
  - Masterplan for ocean accounting as guide in setting MPA Networks
  - Great SEA Blue Wall Initiative
- Develop in-region trainers
- MPA Toolbox
- MPA Outlook Report
- Blue Carbon

Habitats (Coral Reefs, Mangroves, Seagrass, Coastal Wetlands)

- Small grants fund programme
- Green Fins Project
  - Advocacy campaigns
  - Harmonization of code of conduct in marine tourism
  - Business plan
- Restoration and protection

Cross-cutting

- Working Group, Regional Activity Centres
- Data collection, management, and sharing platform or database
- Community of Practice and knowledge sharing
- Climate Change
- Capacity building
- Monitoring
- Financial Development and Sustainability
- Community Participation?
- Livelihood?

Figure 1: Recommendations for COBSEA work at different scales.

2. Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

The establishment of a Working Group (WG) on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems is a proposed first step that would guide the formulation of a portfolio of substantive activities in the East Asian Seas.

In the past decades, COBSEA has made progress in the development of a resource base in this area, including technical tools as well as network of national institutions and resource persons, e.g., the establishment of working groups on coral reefs, mangroves, coastal wetlands and fishery refugia[2]. However, to consistently improve the marine and coastal ecosystems, fragmented efforts and governance should be structured and streamlined by a working group that provides long-term and strategic guidance for the whole field of marine and coastal ecosystems. This will not only strengthen the sustainability of existing and further efforts in the area, but also alleviate the workload of National Focal Points (NFP), to increase the capacity of the existing human resource base, and to conduct work in a holistic, but tailor-made manner for every participating country.

The WG on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems shall consist of at least one representative of each COBSEA country who is an expert in the field of marine conservation. The WG members shall work together to determine the goal, objectives, and activities that COBSEA must undertake to improve the marine environment of the East Asian Seas. The directions that the WG comes up with shall be brought forward to the COBSEA IGM, granted however that the content has already been discussed internally by the WG members in their respective countries. Experts on the topic from UNEP shall also be invited to further guide the discussion and ensure the alignment of the ideas with UNEP activities. The DRAFT Terms of Reference for the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems is found in Annex 3 .

2.1 Goal

- Ensuring sustainability of marine and coastal ecosystems for both people and planet in the context of the East Asian Seas

2.2 Objectives

- To create an open working environment towards a harmonized EAS effort on addressing concerns on the marine and coastal ecosystems at both regional and national levels.
- To identify regional and national priorities and ensure the representativeness of the COBSEA participating countries in the actions and activities related to marine and coastal ecosystems.
- To advise the COBSEA Secretariat on marine and coastal ecosystems strategies for the East Asian Seas, including the goals, objectives, actions, and indicators.
- To support COBSEA countries in attaining their goals and targets in their work on the marine and coastal ecosystems and biodiversity.

2.3 Functions

- Provide expert guidance on marine and coastal ecosystem for the East Asian Seas, including, but not limited to, marine and coastal spatial planning, marine protected areas, and the different marine and coastal habitats (e.g., coral reefs, mangroves,

[2] COBSEA (2018). *COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022.* Secretariat of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and United Nations Environment Programme, Bangkok.

seagrass, coastal wetlands) that will be included in the COBSEA Strategic Directions and future related projects and activities;
- Serve as liaison between the COBSEA Secretariat and COBSEA countries on all topics related to marine and coastal ecosystem conservation and governance;
- Develop biennial workplans, based on the Framework, to determine specific activities and targets to be approved by the COBSEA Intergovernmental meeting;
- Report on the implementation and progress of the Working Group responsibilities in the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting;
- Support in the development of project proposals and provide technical guidance and coordination on the implementation of projects and related activities on marine and coastal ecosystems; and
- Establish Expert Working Groups according to the specific thematic areas of the Framework, as needed.

2.4 Participation

The COBSEA Secretariat will request nominations of 1-2 experts from each COBSEA participating country as representatives in the Working Group. The COBSEA National Focal Points will communicate nominations for the WG. The COBSEA Secretariat will follow-up in the collection of names and organization of WG meetings.

An expert should:
- Be a national of his or her own country regardless of the working location;
- Demonstrate representativeness through utmost overall familiarity with marine and coastal ecosystem situation in his or her representing country;
- Have led or participated in regional governance initiatives;
- Actively practice at the forefront of politics and/or academia;
- Have professional working proficiency in English language; and
- Be interested in long-term engagement regarding topics stated under “objectives” with COBSEA in the marine and coastal ecosystems area.

2.5 Benefits as Working Group Members

As a WG member, the expert shall enjoy the following benefits:
- In-depth cooperation with COBSEA Secretariat, a regional intergovernmental mechanism administered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP);
- Opportunities to engage and exchange with other leading experts from East Asian and Southeast Asian countries on a regional level; and,
- Contribution to a better managed East Asian Seas Region as a change maker.

2.6 Operational Costs

To minimize the operation costs, WG members shall conduct their work and communication online as much as possible.

However, adequate funding can be important to encourage the WG members to involve in the COBSEA work. Funding possibilities will be identified for participation in physical meetings of the WG.

2.6.1 Funding Possibilities

The following are the funding possibilities for the operations of the MCE Working Group.

- A dedicated "Marine Ecosystem Trust Fund": The "Marine Ecosystem Trust Fund" shall be a money pool dedicated to the daily operation contributed by the COBSEA participating countries. As noted at the first part of IGM 25, the COBSEA efforts and capacity shall be supported to a higher extent. As regional cooperation activities in Marine and Coastal Ecosystems by COBSEA will be intensified, the Marine Ecosystem Trust Fund can promote the engagement of experts, thus the strategic planning and implementation of new initiatives. This can be a source of funding for the WG.
- Global Partnerships: This possibility was considered as highly viable during the study of the Working Group on Marine Litter. The WG can be an informal regional node for existing global partnerships. Examples for those global partnerships are: Marine Ecosystem Services Partnership, International Partnership on Marine Protected Areas, Biodiversity and Climate Change, Blue Carbon Partnership, the Blue Carbon Initiative, Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN), etc. This can be sources of funding for the WG. However, it also means more commitments from side of the global partnership.
- COBSEA Trust Fund: The COBSEA Trust Fund can serve as an interim source of funding to encourage the involvement of the WG.

2.7 Working Group Annual Meeting

An annual meeting of the Working Group is proposed, subject to availability of funding, and in conjunction with other meetings. It shall be hosted by one or more institutions in COBSEA participating countries, or beyond. It will draw upon the example of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter.

2.8 Organisational Structure of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Programme

The organigram below provides a suggested organizational structure of the marine and coastal ecosystems programme after the establishment of the WG.

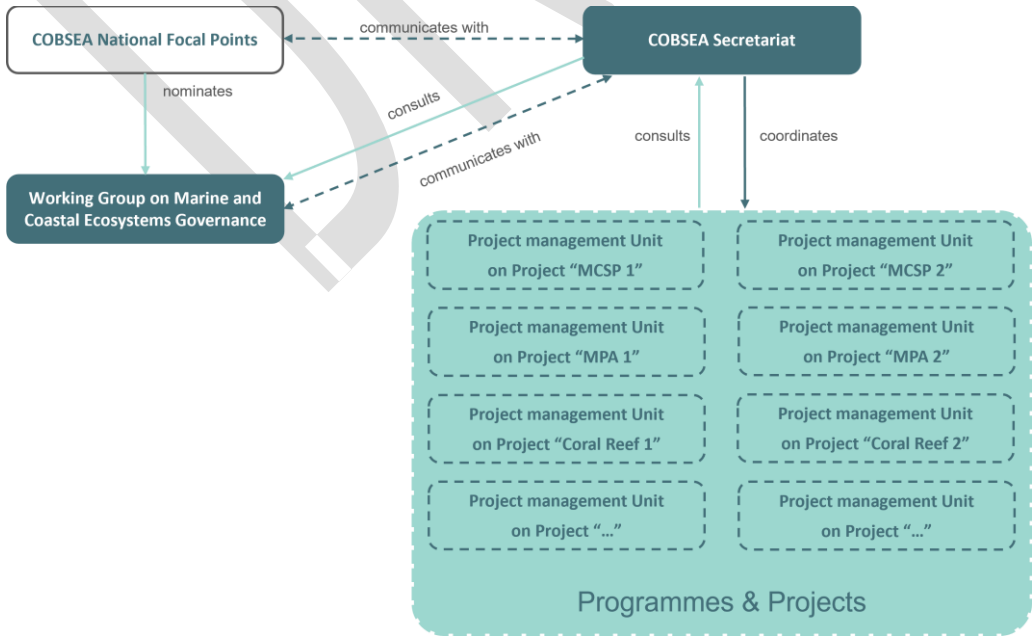


Figure 2: Working dynamics between the COBSEA Secretariat and WG.

3. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning

Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning is an ecosystem-based management approach that is conducted through "… a public process of analyzing and allocating parts of the three-dimensional marine spaces to specific uses, to achieve ecological, economic and social objectives that are usually achieved through the political process."[3] COBSEA's Strategic Directions and previous projects and reports have identified MCSP as a way to balance the use of marine space and resources in the region by integrating economic and social activities in ecosystem conservation. The use of MCSP can identify the relevant areas that should be protected alongside the different activities occurring in both the marine and coastal areas. MCSP also provides a way of contextualizing how these activities, such as tourism, fishing, industrial, etc., benefit or harm protected areas and vice versa. The WG shall provide recommendations and insights into the development of the MCSP Project; however, this section provides general ideas that can be considered for COBSEA.

3.1 Objectives

- To implement a comprehensive marine and coastal spatial planning project at different scales in the EAS: regional, national, and local;
- To support countries in the development and implementation of their MCSP policies and plans at different scales, whether at national and/or local; and
- To increase the capacity of authorities, particularly at sub-national and local levels to develop and implement MCSP.

3.2 General Project Ideas

3.2.1 Updating of the East Asian Seas Marine Spatial Planning Guidelines

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) previously supported the development of the existing guidelines entitled, "Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone of the East Asian Seas Region: Integrating Emerging Issues and Modern Management Approaches". This was adapted by 5 EAS countries and was integrated by 1 EAS country in an existing policy. The guidelines can be further improved to include the wider scope of marine and coastal spatial planning and to incorporate:

- the allotment of 10% coverage for MPAs in line with SDG 14;
- all EAS countries; and
- the development of blue economy to support livelihoods.

NOTE: The guidelines are only nine years old and most of the content would surely still be applicable. What needs to be done, first and foremost, is to determine if the old document was even useful for the countries to avoid developing guidelines that are not really used by countries.

3.2.2 Development of the MCSP for the EAS Region

The COBSEA MCPS Policy Study have identified several recommendations to improve MCSP in the region, such as increasing transboundary and regional collaboration and MCSP in areas under the perspective of large marine ecosystems. A regional marine and coastal spatial plan can guide all activities in both international and national waters within the EAS can support

[3] Ehler C, Douvere F. Marine spatial planning: a step-by-step approach toward ecosystem-based management. Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and Man and the Biosphere Programme. IOC manual and guides, No. 53, ICAM Dossier No. 6. UNESCO: Paris; 2009

cooperation in managing the area, particularly, contentious areas and transboundary ecosystems. In the likely even that a regional MCSP is not feasible, a subregional version should be considered. The regional MCSP shall:

- identify regional areas for conservation (leading to a regional MPA Network), economic activity (including tourism and fishing), etc.;
- be based on scientific findings and multi-stakeholder consultations to ensure quality and performance of the design;
- lead to the development of MCSP Cooperation Center; and,
- ensure adaptation of mechanisms to combat the effects of climate change.

3.2.3 Development and implementation of national MCSP

All EAS countries shall have national guidelines to support the development and institutionalization of MCSP. The guidelines must ensure vertical and horizontal integration among key stakeholders of different sectors. This can lead into the development of national MCSP that covers all the marine and coastal waters of the individual countries. Doing so can also lead to identifying the 10% marine protected areas throughout the country.

Note: The previously mentioned SIDA project guided 5 countries in adapting their own MCSP guidelines while one country integrated it in an existing document. If these are still used and are relevant, the development of national guidelines is not necessary and work can focus on the development of a national MCSP.

3.2.4 In-Country Support in MCSP Activities

COBSEA countries to identify MCSP activities that they need support in. This can include a range of activities such as working on the national MCSP, supporting the development and implementation of MCSP in local areas of the country, and capacity building and trainings. The **Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) Transition Framework** must be integrated in all these activities. The central principle for SBE initiative is that it must be "**ecosystem-based** (balancing ecological, economic, social and conservation goals and objectives toward sustainable development); **place- or area-based** (local, national or regional); **integrated across economic sectors and among governmental agencies** (vertically and horizontally); **adaptive** (capable of learning from experience); **strategic and anticipatory** (focused on the long-term); **science- and technology-based** (technology modernization and business innovation); and **participatory**, (with stakeholders actively in the process)."[4]

3.3 Existing Guidelines and Tools

COBSEA – Spatial Planning Guidelines for EAS	Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone of the East Asian Seas Region: Integrating Emerging Issues and Modern Management Approaches"
UNEP – MSP and ICZM to Support SDGs	Marine Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Zone Management Approaches to Support the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal Targets 14.1 and 14.2

[4] [Unpublished] United Nations Environment Programme (n.d.). *Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning Policy in the East Asian Seas: Assessment, Lessons Learned and Recommendations towards ecosystem-based management and sustainable blue economy.*

4. Marine Protected Area and Marine Protected Area Network

Marine Protected Area is a tool to provide protection in areas of the marine ecosystems where human activities are regulated to restore the health of the ocean. "They can be particularly effective when developed as part of a wider management solution"[5], such as a well-designed marine and coastal spatial plan. Both Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 and the UN SDG 14 indicates that at least 10% of coastal and marine areas are conserved, the draft Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework raised the target to 30%, and such mechanism to do so is through the development of MPAs. Apart from merely establishing MPAs, there is also a need to ensure the effectiveness of MPAs in meeting their goals, especially through its governance system. Increasingly, the establishment of MPA Networks which tackles both social and ecological connectivity of MPAs, is considered as a process that increases the achievement of conservation objectives. The WG shall provide insights and recommendations on the MPA work of COBSEA.

4.1 Objectives

- To increase the coverage of MPAs in the East Asian Seas to reach the target of 10% (or 30%) while ensuring the socio-economic and ecological quality and value in the expansion;
- To strengthen the governance of MPAs, such as the use of the MPA toolbox, establishment of the MPA Network, and increasing dialogue between the different countries and experts; and,
- To ensure that MPA stakeholders benefit from the ecosystem services of the MPA using various tools, such as payment for ecosystem services, blue economy activities, and financial sustainability.

4.2 General Project Ideas

4.2.1 Establishment of Regional MPA Network

MPA Networks enhance the effectiveness of individual MPAs and physically-linked MPAs in protected biological resources for the ecosystem as well as for society. IUCN-WCPA (2008) defines MPA Networks as "a collection of individual MPAs or reserves operation co-operatively and synergistically, at various spatial scales and with a range of protection levels that are designed to meet objectives that a single reserve cannot achieve."[6] Therefore, the establishment of MPA Networks can help in attaining the 10% target when an area, whose marine ecosystem does not create an environment conducive for the development of MPAs, can instead support in the governance of adjoining MPAs. MPA Networks also increase the resilience of individual MPAs when connecting MPAs are able to provide the ecological support needed by each MPA. Thus, the establishment of a Regional MPA Network must be grounded on scientific findings, ecological relevance, and geared towards improving the value of the individual MPA as well as the overall marine ecosystem. However, the UNEP-WCMC (2008) study **recommends that the establishment of MPA Networks should be "within a broader spatial planning", thus it is imperative that 3.2.2 as presented above should be prioritized prior to developing an EAS MPA Network**. The COBSEA Strategic Directions targets the establishment of network of MPAs in the East Asian Seas.

The COBSEA MPA and MPA Network Situational Analysis has identified the following sites as potential MPA Networks within the region:

[5] Promoting Effective Marine Protected Areas | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

[6] : IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (IUCN-WCPA) (2008). *Establishing Marine Protected Area Networks—Making It Happen.* Washington, D.C.: IUCN-WCPA, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and The Nature Conservancy.

Table 2: Recommended MPA Networks in the COBEA Region

Location	Size	Countries
Gulf of Thailand Large Marine Ecosystem	1,927 km^2	Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, Viet Nam
South China Sea Large Marine Ecosystem	91,480 km^2	Brunei, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem	3,128 km^2	China, RO Korea

Apart from these, further studies can be undertaken to determine the feasibility of a single regional MPA Network that covers all nine COBSEA countries.

The UNEP MPA Network Review[7] cited Ardron et al. (2008) in determining the eight key stages in the development of an MPA Network:

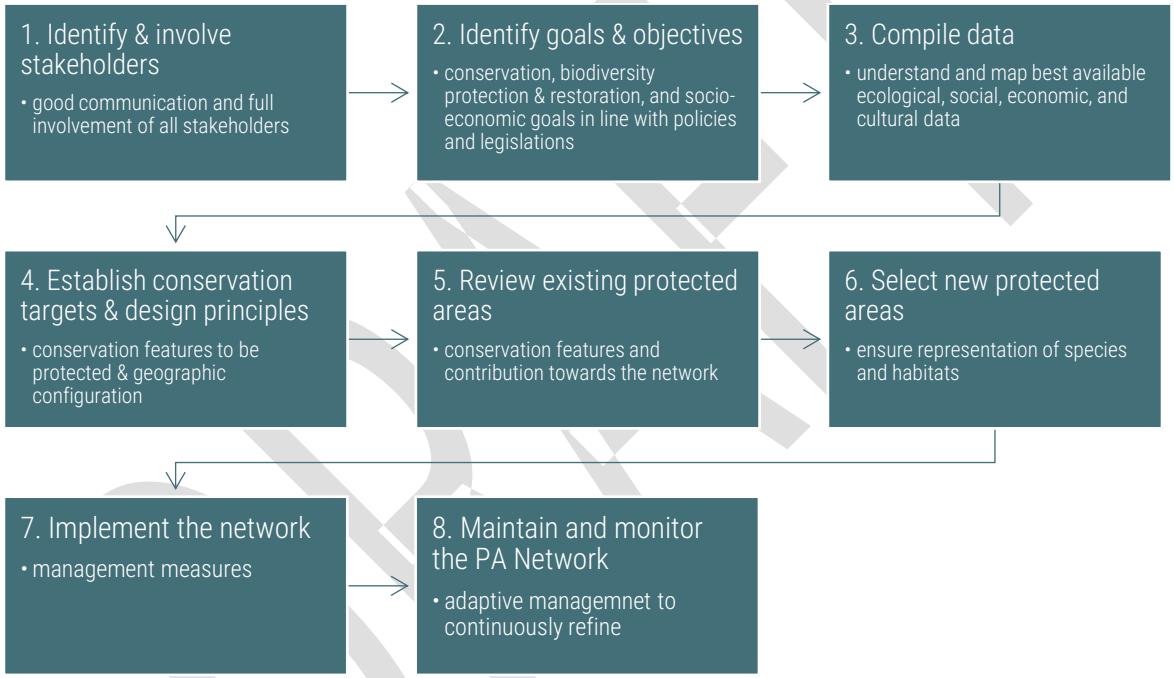


Figure 3: Key stages in establishing an MPA Network (Ardron et al., 2008).

4.2.2 Strengthening the Governance of MPA and MPA Networks

COBSEA countries to identify MPA and MPA Network activities that they see potential for support. These can include a range of activities such as the establishment and/or expansion of MPAs and MPA Networks, capacity building to improve the governance of MPA and MPA Networks, providing support on developing sustainable finance and livelihood initiatives such as through blue economy and payment for ecosystem services (PES)[8], and MPA monitoring activities. Ideally, these activities cover large marine ecosystems within the country and would contribute to the COBSEA MPA Network. These MPAs should also identify clear benefits for people in addition to nature. Further guidance on the needs of the individual countries are to be provided by the WG and if possible, by the EWP on MPA.

[7] UNEP-WCMC (2008). *National and Regional Networks of Marine Protected Areas: A Review of Progress.* UNEP-WCMC, Cambridge.
[8] "PES deals can offer the rural poor an opportunity to augment their income as stewards of the land by implementing practices to restore and maintain ecosystem services" from Payments for Ecosystem Services: Getting Started - A Primer (unep.org)

MPA Toolbox

UNEP is developing an MPA Toolbox which could also provide guidance in identifying the challenges for MPAs. The MPA Toolbox is structured around four key themes:

- MPA effectiveness
- Climate "future-proofing" MPAs, MPAs as nature-based solution
- MPA business planning and benefit sharing
- MPAs and sustainable livelihoods

This could be used by COBSEA in assisting COBSEA participating countries in improving the management of existing MPAs and/or in preparation for upcoming MPAs.

4.3 Existing Guidelines and Tools

UNEP – MPA Governance Guide	Enabling Effective and Equitable Marine Protected Areas - Guidance on combining governance approaches | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
MPA Toolbox	The MPA Guide (protectedplanet.net)
UNEP – MPA Network Review	National and Regional Networks of Marine Protected Areas: A Review of Progress
IUCN-WCPA MPA Network Guide	Establishing Resilient Marine Protected Area Networks – Making it Happen
UNEP WCMC Ecosystem Services Guidance	UNEP-WCMC Resources

5. Marine and Coastal Habitats

5.1 Coral Reefs

Coral Reefs are an important marine ecosystem that serve as habitats for numerous marine species and is estimated to provide ecosystem services to around 1 billion people[9]. The coral reefs in the East Asian Seas in particular account for 30% of the world's total.[10] COBSEA has historically been active in the conservation of coral reefs, such as through the Green Fins project which UNEP and COBSEA initiated in the East Asian Seas. COBSEA is also a member of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), which is a global partnership that conserves coral reefs. The 2020 Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) Report on the Status of Coral Reefs of the East Asian Seas of a continuous decline of coral reefs in the region, specifically during the mass coral bleaching events in 2010 and 2016. Coral reef conservation can be achieved through the effective implementation of MPAs and, in areas, with high tourism activities, through an agreed code of conduct when it comes to coral reefs.

5.1.1 Objectives

- To integrate, through policy development, the responsible interaction with coral reefs, especially in tourism areas;
- To increase awareness on the value and vulnerability of coral reefs; and
- To restore damaged and deteriorated coral reef areas.

5.1.2 General Project Ideas

5.1.2.1 Green Fins Project

The Green Fins Project is an existing UNEP initiative that was piloted in the East Asian Seas in 2004. The goal of Green Fins is to improve the standard and code of conduct of the scuba diving and tourism industry in coral reefs. Green Fins members can boast as being part of a network of environmental-conscious tourism practitioners. This ensures that tourism activities that are conducted under the auspices of Green Fins do not interfere with the natural processes of coral reefs. Additionally, Green Fins dive members are also capable of conducting coral reef monitoring which is crucial in determining whether the protection mechanisms for the coral reefs are sufficient or whether more efforts should be done.

While COBSEA has not been working with Green Fins during the last decade, Green Fins continues to function in several countries in the region. Reactivating this project can lead to several activities:

- Information, education, and communication campaigns with tourists and communities living near coral reefs;
- Improve the standards and code of conduct of scuba diving and other marine water tourism activities, potentially leading to policies that must be adapted by the national and local governments;
- Regular monitoring of coral reefs; and
- Coral reef restoration in areas that are experiencing degradation.

[9] Why protecting coral reefs matters | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
[10] International Coral Reef Initiative (2021). *Status of Coral Reefs of the World: 2020.* Chapter 7. Status and trends of coral reefs o the East Asian Seas Region.

5.1.2.2 Small-Fund Grants Programme

The Small-Fund Grants Programme which COBSEA implemented in 2002-2003 was considered successful with the recommendation for its continuation. The programme provided support in coral reef monitoring and capacity building to MPA managers. A similar kind of small-grants project can be considered by COBSEA where local communities/governments which have coral reefs can apply for funding from COBSEA to conduct any of the following activities:

- Coral reef monitoring of existing MPAs or as part of data gathering needed towards the development of MPAs;
- Coral reef rehabilitation;
- Capacity building on monitoring and evaluation; and,
- Advocacy campaign.

The Small-Fund Grants Programme can work hand-in-hand with Green Fins in the implementation of activities at the grassroots level. In 2021, UNEP and ICRI continued to implement the Small Grants Programme to support activities on coral reefs.

5.1.3 Existing Guidelines and Tools

UNEP – Coral Reef Restoration Guide	Coral Reef Restoration: A guide to coral restoration method | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
GCRMN – Status of Coral Reefs	Status of Coral Reefs of the East Asian Seas 2020

5.2 Mangroves, Seagrasses, and Coastal Wetlands

The COBSEA Strategic Directions identified mangroves, seagrasses, and coastal wetlands as critical habitats that should be focused upon. PEMSEA reported that the East Asian Seas hold 31% of the world's mangroves and 33% of the world's seagrass beds[11]. Additionally, COBSEA countries are also home to 139 RAMSAR Wetlands of International Importance; the breakdown is available at Table 3[12].

Table 3: Ramsar Sites in EAS Countries

Country	Number
Cambodia	5
China	64
Indonesia	7
Malaysia	7
Philippines	8
RO Korea	24
Singapore	0
Thailand	15
Viet Nam	9

These ecosystems have an important value in ensuring biodiversity, addressing climate change, and disaster mitigation. Moreover, when well-managed, these ecosystems also improve the coral reef ecosystems and can form part of a network of MPAs. The resilience of the marine ecosystem is greatly enhanced when there are multiple ecosystems present in the area. Mangroves and seagrasses are ecosystems that some COBSEA countries already include in their scope of MPAs. Finally, the conservation of these ecosystems can be part of blue economy and blue carbon. Carbon sequestration through the marine environment is found to be significantly higher than that from rainforests.

[11] PEMSEA (2018). *State of the Oceans and Coasts: Blue Economy Growth in the East Asian Seas Region.*. Regional_SOC_20190611.pdf (pemsea.org)
[12] Country profiles | Ramsar

5.2.1 Objectives

- To expand COBSEA's work in other marine ecosystems, including mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetlands - the protection of which contributes to the 10% target of the SDG and CBD; and
- To ensure that the conservation of the identified ecosystems contribute to the wellbeing of surrounding communities.

5.2.2 General Project Ideas

5.2.2.1 Establishment, Expansion, and Improve Governance of Habitats

Through the development of a successful MCSP as targeted at Section 3 above, the areas for mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetlands will be properly determined. This could pave the way towards identifying the kinds of activities that can be done in these areas, which ideally are towards ecosystem conservation. Mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetland areas shall be put under protected area governance. The connectivity between and among these ecosystems, together with coral reefs, must also be taken into consideration. The presence of these protected areas should not negatively impact the lives of neighbouring communities. Mangroves, in particular, is a very important resource that communities need for their survival. The WG shall provide guidance in the specific activities needed for these ecosystems.

5.2.2.2 Restoration Projects

The conservation of existing ecosystems is still the best way to go forward. However, there may be instance that degraded and depleted mangrove, seagrass, and coastal wetland ecosystems can be considered for restoration, particularly those that are connected or as part of large protected ecosystems. Great care, including extensive research, should be prioritized when doing restoration programs.

5.2.3 Existing Guidelines and Tools

Nairobi Convention – Guidelines for Mangroves	Guidelines on Mangrove Ecosystem Restoration for the Western Indian Ocean Region - Western Indian Ocean Ecosystem Guidelines and Toolkits (unep.org)
UNEP – Seagrass and PES	Protecting Seagrass Through Payments for Ecosystem Services: A Community Guide | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
UNEP – Importance of Seagrass	Out of the Blue: The Value of Seagrasses to the Environment and to People | UNEP - UN Environment Programme

6. Cross-Cutting Mechanisms

Several other concepts have been proposed and brought up throughout the different projects, reports, studies, and frameworks. While certainly not new, the concepts below are cross-cutting mechanisms that, as much as possible, should be integrated in the different projects and activities proposed in this framework.

6.1 Blue Economy

UNEP is presently implementing the "Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative" which "aims to facilitate sustainable ocean-based economic, social and environmental benefits within the planetary boundaries of oceans and coasts".[13] Sustainable Blue Economy is when the "sustainable use of ocean and coastal resources generates equitably and inclusively distributed benefits for people, protects and restores healthy ocean ecosystems, and contributes to the delivery of global ambitions for a sustainable future"[14]. It is therefore looking at economic activities in the sea while ensuring that the marine environment is conserved at the same time.

The ASEAN, where most of the COBSEA countries are also members of, have made a declaration on the Blue Economy last October 2021. In their statement, they have committed to take the leading role on regional cooperation regarding Blue Economy. Particularly, cooperation will be explored in the field of marine environmental protection, marine and coastal ecosystem protection, sea and ocean governance and management, among others.

Blue Economy can be integrated through the MCSP where areas for economic activities, and which kind of economic activities, are clearly identified. It can also be integrated in MPA and the different marine and coastal ecosystems where human economic activities are occurring, such as tourism and sustainable fisheries.

Resource:

UNEP – Blue Economy	Governing Coastal Resources - Implications for a Sustainable Blue Economy
ASEAN Declaration	ASEAN Leaders Declaration on Blue Economy

6.2 Blue Carbon and Climate Change

The marine environment plays a crucial role in limiting climate change by sequestering carbon. About 55% of the world's biological carbon are captured by marine living organisms. Ensuring healthy marine ecosystems is a nature-based solution that contributes in addressing climate change while mitigating the potential effects of climate-related disaster. COBSEA can integrate the concept of blue carbon in MPAs, particularly in mangrove and seagrass conservation. There is a need to account for how much carbon are stored in the marine ecosystems of EAS, and determine the value of such when translated in monetary terms. Countries and companies are willing to pay for carbon offset to reach carbon neutrality. Income from this can be used to further improve the marine ecosystem of the EAS.

[13] Enabling sustainable, resilient and inclusive blue economies | UNEP - UN Environment Programme
[14] [Unpublished] United Nations Environment Programme (n.d.). *Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning Policy in the East Asian Seas: Assessment, Lessons Learned and Recommendations towards ecosystem-based management and sustainable blue economy.*

Resource:

UNEP – Blue Carbon	Blue carbon: the role of healthy oceans in binding carbon

6.3 Data Management

Several forms of data management needs have been discussed in the many projects and reports of COBSEA. The East Asian Seas Action Plan recognizes the importance of data management towards the success of activities in COBSEA. This ranges from collection, monitoring, storage, reporting, and sharing. Data management is particularly important for determining baselines and in reporting against the different frameworks that COBSEA abides by. Multiple data management systems already exists through different efforts by various organizations. COBSEA does not need to add to the present initiatives. Instead, COBSEA can support and utilize these efforts, and participate in their development and enhancement.

The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC) operates two relevant management systems, the World Database on Protected Areas and the World Database on other effective area based conservation measures (OECM). UNEP-WCMC sets the global standards on science and data which are relevant for developing actions and policy. The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) are developing an ASEAN Clearing House Mechanism and ASEAN Biodiversity Dashboard for data management in the region. Other existing data management systems are developed by PEMSEA and the UNEP Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS) Ocean Programme.

Resource:

UNEP WCMC – World Database	World Database on Protected Areas
UNEP WCMC OECM Database	World Database on other effective area based conservation measures (OECM)
UNEP WCMC User Manual	User Manual for the World Database on Protected Areas and world database on other effective area-based conservation measures: 1.6
ASEAN Clearing House	The ASEAN Clearing House Mechanism | ASEAN Clearing House Mechanism (chm-cbd.net)

6.4 Community of Practice and Knowledge Sharing

When there are sufficient and well-managed data, interested and relevant stakeholders are able to learn and participate better in decision-making and the implementation of the projects and activities. Developing a Community of Practice has been recommended in the different reports and projects of COBSEA. Several streams can be considered in developing a Community of Practice, such as through the different thematic areas presented in this document with the support of the EWG or through the different project as implemented.

Knowledge sharing can also be achieved by engaging the education sector. Communities, particularly coastal communities, shall learn the value of and can be actively engaged in

marine and coastal conservation in elementary and high school. This provides an opportunity for raising environmentally aware communities.

6.5 Community Participation

Participation is a crucial aspect in any development work, especially work that directly affect the wellbeing of the community. As a major stakeholder in marine and coastal ecosystems governance, coastal communities, especially women and the fishing community, have a vital role in both the governance of the marine ecosystem and as beneficiaries of the ecosystem services that the marine environment provides. Community participation through consultation and active participation must be integrated in all the proposed projects in this document. The UNEP MPA Guidelines recognize the role of surrounding communities in the governance of the marine environment.

Resource:

UNEP – Gender Mainstreaming	Gender Mainstreaming in the Management of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

7. Implementation Strategy

The implementation of this framework would largely depend on the approval of the Focal Persons during the Intergovernmental Meeting, planning by the WG on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, and donor preference and availability of funds. As with the spatial scale and scope presented in Figure 1 above, the programmes and projects identified are ideally implemented in a systematic process from the wider activities of the MCSP, to more specific activities with the habitats. However, the Secretariat recognizes that programme and project implementation are mostly dynamic and that these can happen simultaneously. The following figure explicitly presents the interconnectivity of the programmes presented in this framework.

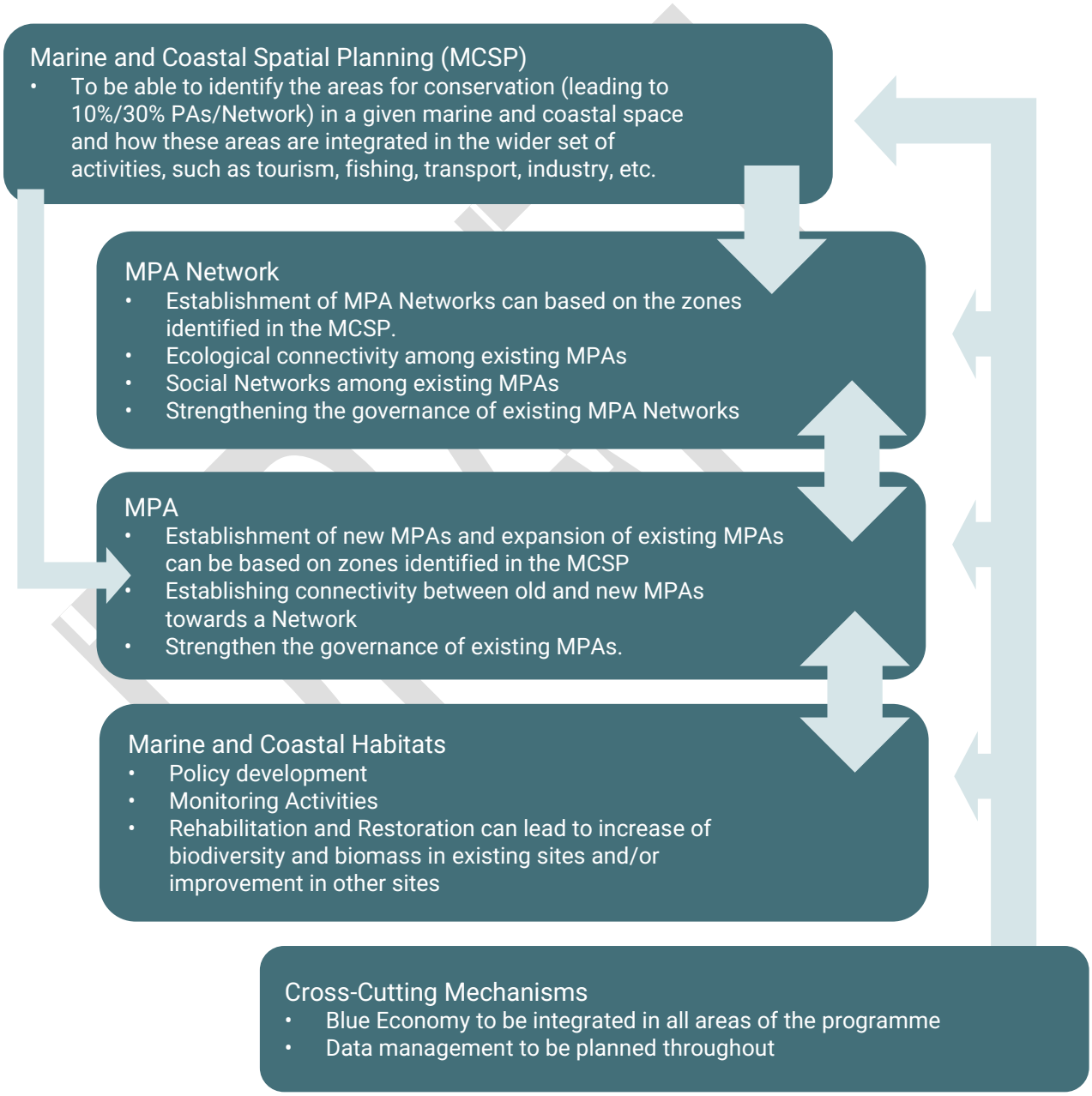


Figure 4: Proposed implementation strategy based on linkages of the programmes and activities.

8. Partnerships

Below is a summary of partners that COBSEA can consider for each of the thematic areas and/or projects.

Table 4: Potential partners per thematic area

Organization	MCSP	MPA	Coral Reef	Mangroves, Seagrass, Coastal Wetlands	Blue Economy	Data Mgt
ASEAN						
Coral Triangle Initiative						
Green Fins						
ICRI / GCRMN						
Mangroves for the Future						
PEMSEA						
UNEP GEMS Ocean						
UNEP WCMC						

9. Considerations for the Future

As the framework and its implementation progresses, further efforts to improve the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems in the future can be considered.

9.1 Development of Regional Activity Centres

A Regional Activity Centre (RAC) is an autonomous international or regional organization that provides technical functions and activities for the Regional Seas and participating countries. Several Regional Seas across the globe have been developing Regional Activity Centres. During 24th Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA, participating countries were requested to review the guidelines of developing Regional Activity Centres. The establishment of a RAC for the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems programme of COBSEA will depend on the need as identified by the IGM and the Working Group.

9.2 Expert Working Groups (EWGs) to support the Working Group

As proposed in Chapter 2, after the establishment of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems as a priority activity, Expert Working Groups (EWGs) in the identified Thematic Areas of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems programme can be created to provide technical support to the WG.

EWGs are dedicated expert groups in the COBSEA Thematic Areas in MCSP, MPAs, and Marine and Coastal Habitats, taking up a technical advisory role in the implementation of COBSEA work in marine and coastal ecosystems. Same as the WG, EWGs ensures that each country's needs in the Thematic Areas are reflected and represented through its representative(s) in the respective EWG. They also carry out work for COBSEA in the areas such as selecting pilot sites of a COBSEA project, leading monitoring efforts, etc. EWGs report to the WG and are coordinated by the COBSEA Secretariat

As indicated before, COBSEA has established working groups in the past on coral reefs, mangroves, coastal wetlands and fishery refugia[15]. The proposal to create EWGs does not aim to duplicate the past efforts, but rather to integrate them into an organized structure for the work programme of marine and coastal ecosystems, and to ensure the long-term engagement of countries in the implementation of the work programme. As some EWGs will be created, other EWGs can be expanded from the existing working groups COBSEA established earlier. Further EWGs shall be explored as needs and projects arise, and the priorities and order for the reactivation or creation of the EWGs shall be subject to the current projects and general strategic needs.

9.3 Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures

Beyond protected areas, other effective area-based conservation measure (OECM) has been recognized as an alternative means of achieving the conservation of nature. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)[16] defines an OECM as:

> "a geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained longterm outcomes

[15] COBSEA (2018). *COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022*. Secretariat of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and United Nations Environment Programme, Bangkok.
[16] Convention on Biological Diversity (2018). *Protected Area and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures.* Protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (cbd.int)

for the in situ conservation of biodiversity, with associated ecosystem functions and services and, where applicable, cultural, spiritual, socioeconomic, and other locally relevant values"

OECM has been recognized as a means of achieving conservation targets posted in Aichi 2020 and the upcoming Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. Marine and coastal areas in the East Asian Seas may already be delivering conservation without needing to be converted to protected area status due to their other use. COBSEA can further look at OECMs existing in the area.

Resource:

IUCN Guidance on OECM	Recognising and reporting other effective area-based conservation measures

Annex 1: Relevant Global and Regional Frameworks and Indicators

Thematic Area	SDG	UNEP Marine and Coastal Strategy	UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2022 - 2025	Regional Seas SD	Regional Seas Core Indicators	COBSEA Action Plan	COBSEA Strategic Directions	Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (with Climate Change Adaptation)	**Target:** 14.2. Sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid insignificant adverse impacts **Indicator:** 14.2.1. Number of countries using ecosystem-based approaches to managing marine areas	**Strategic Objective 1:** Establish knowledge-base on marine and coastal ecosystems to inform policies on human activities affecting their functions **Strategic Objective 3:** Support policies and strategies enabling integrated management and sustainable use of marine and coastal ecosystem services	**Nature Action** Outcome 1: An economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is established Outcome 2: Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks Outcome 3: Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced	Marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) promoted towards the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework targets. • Marine protected areas designated, effectively managed and ecological connectivity strengthened. • Sea areas under spatial planning increased. • Degraded marine ecosystems restored. • Cooperation and integration of Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) strengthened between different RSCAPs and various sectoral organizations (e.g., fisheries and biodiversity organisations).	**No. 19. Category:** Climate Change Adaptation **Indicator:** 1) % national adaptation plans in place 2) Sector based national adaptation plans 3) Number of existing national and local coastal and marine plans incorporating climate change adaptation -- **No. 22. Category:** National ICZM in Place **Indicator:** National ICZM guidelines and enabling legislation adopted	**Management aspects of rehabilitation of vital ecosystems and restoration of ecologically or economically important species and communities** 23. Active measures to rehabilitate damaged natural habitats (within the realm of scientific and economic possibility) and to replenish depleted species populations will need to be undertaken to restore the kind of sustainable productivity which serves as the basis for the generation of food, other useful products, and amenities on which human populations depend. Establishment of regional mechanism for the development of cooperative management approaches to the conservation of migratory marine species need to be encouraged and developed.	**Theme 2, activity i.** Review of national and regional legal and policy frameworks in the COBSEA region and recommendations for creating enabling conditions for ecosystem-based approaches **Theme 2, activity ii.** Developing regional guidelines for an ecosystem-based approach to marine and coastal planning and management **Theme 2, activity iii**. Building capacity on marine and coastal planning and management, including to address climate change in the coastal and marine environment **Theme 2, activity iv.** Exchange of information, knowledge and best practices	**Post 2020 Target 1**. By 2030, all land and sea areas globally are under spatial planning addressing land/sea use change, retaining most of the existing intact and wilderness areas.
Marine Protected Areas and MPA Networks	**Target:** 14.5. Conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas **Indicator:** 14.5.1. Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas				**No 21. Category:** Critical marine habitat under protection **Indicator:** % marine protected areas designated -- **No 15. Category:** Loss of critical habitat	**Establishment of a viable network of marine protected areas** 24. A network of properly managed marine protected areas including strictly protected reserves should be established. Critical habitats to form part of this network are to be selected on the basis of their productivity, uniqueness, or vulnerability. Such a measure would have the twin goals of conserving biodiversity	**Theme 2, activity v.** Establishing a COBSEA network of marine protected areas (MPAs) **Theme 2, activity vi.** Evaluating the effectiveness of the management of MPAs	**Post 2020 Target 2**. By 2030, restore [X%] of degraded marine ecosystems and connectivity among them. • Global Ecosystem Restoration Index [GEO BON – iDiv] (Post-2020) **Post 2020 Target 3:** Aiming by 2030 to protect and conserve at least 30% of the planet through a well-connected and effective system of protected

Thematic Area	SDG	UNEP Marine and Coastal Strategy	UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2022 - 2025	Regional Seas SD	Regional Seas Core Indicators	COBSEA Action Plan	COBSEA Strategic Directions	Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework
					Indicator: Trends in critical habitat extent and condition	(to the degree possible) and maintaining useful levels of productivity with respect to human needs.		areas and other effective area-based conservation measures with a focus on areas particularly important for biodiversity. • Protected Area Coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas [BirdLife International, UNEP-WCMC & IUCN] (Post-2020)

Annex 2: Summary of Marine & Coastal Planning and Management Initiatives of COBSEA

Contents

1. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning

1.1 Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone – Disaster Prevention and Sustainable Development, 2010 – 2013; SIDA

Objectives

To reduce and prevent impacts of natural disasters, climate change, and sea level rise, and to promote sustainable development of the coastal areas in COBSEA members countries through application of spatial planning for integrated coastal zone management and ecosystem based management

Outcome

- Spatial Planning Regional Resource Document entitled Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone of the East Asian Seas Region: Integrating Emerging Issues and Modern Management Approaches"
- Adaptation of the resource document in 5 countries and integration in 1 country
- ~500 individuals trained in MCSP

Recommendations

- 2nd phase with the following focus:
  - Establishing regional network on CMSP
  - CMSP pilot demonstration at local level
  - Institutionalizing CMSP
- Establishment of national team of instructors
  - Trainings to focus on sub-national and local authorities
- On-the-ground hands-on application of the guidelines such as developing spatial plans

1.2 MCSP Training, 2020; Blue Solutions

Objectives

Building capacity of MCSP in the East Asian Seas region through studying theoretical and practical aspects of spatial planning in marine and coastal areas as well as discussing needs-specific action in each country.

Follow-up Actions

- Implementation of MCSP, stakeholder engagement, data collection and management
- MCSP management practices
- Integrating sectoral visions and government priorities into MCSP
- Community of Practice across COBSEA
  - Pilot studies and demonstration sites
- Regional guidance/guidelines

1.3 Study on the Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning Policy in the East Asian Seas, 2021; Blue Solutions and GIZ

Objectives

To review national and regional legal policy frameworks to identify key recommended actions towards an enabling policy environment for MCSP and ecosystem-based approaches, and to explore linkages with SBD, including exploring challenges and opportunities in applying MCSP for evolving and implementing SBE policy and strategies.

Recommendations

- Develop the techniques for marine and coastal spatial planning in COBSEA participating countries
- Further research and development to better adapt to the needs and characteristics of the region.
- Enhance capacity development
- Strengthen vertical and horizontal integration
- Increase transboundary/regional collaboration
- Invest in coastal and ocean science and strengthen science-policy integration
- Enhance data sharing and coordination
- Anticipate and respond to global and regional development trends

Follow-up Action

- Cooperation platform for MCSP in the EAS Region
- Regional guidance for an ecosystem-based approach to marine and coastal planning and management
- Launch of a marine and coastal spatial planning project

2. Marine Protected Areas

2.1 MPA and MPA Network Situational Analysis, 2022

Objectives

- Define the focus, scope, and activities of a COBSEA network of MPAs to strengthen biodiversity conservation and increase resilience to adverse impacts of climate change;
- Provide adequate information to the 25th COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting for countries to decide upon further efforts towards establishing a COBSEA network of MPAs; and
- Identify key challenges, obstacles and opportunities to establish MPA network(s) in the regions.

Recommendations

- Establish Expert Working Group to guide the implementation of COBSEA MPA Programme
- Increase Awareness and Capacity Building
    - MPA as part of MSP
    - Pool of in region trainers
    - Science- and nature- based decision-making to establish and manage MPAs
    - Capacity in real-time monitoring of MPAs, tourism control measures
    - Risk modelling and measuring benefits and impacts from MPA establishment
- Improving MPA Governance
    - Management effectiveness MPA toolbox and learning platforms
    - Platform for dialogues
    - Financial development policies
- Knowledge and access to information for MPA network establishment and management
    - Master plan for ocean accounting to guide where to set up MPA networks
    - Great SEA Blue Wall Initiative
    - twinning arrangements and knowledge sharing that COBSEA already started under its coral reef projects to exchange MPA management experiences

- Build blue economy initiatives in and around MPAs via community tourism based on best practices that COBSEA initiated
- Network for MPAs will enhance biodiversity conservation
- piloting a blue economy site, or piloting a private-public partnership for blue economy activities to demonstrate the benefits of parametric insurance for resilient community building
- MPA Outlook report for the EAS region like what was done for Western Indian Ocean

3. Coral Reefs

3.1 Small Grants Fund Programme, 2002 – 2003; UNEP & ICRAN

Objectives

- To carry out coral reef monitoring to detect changes in coral reef status, within the framework of ICRAN and Establishment of an Effective Coral Reef Monitoring Network
- To use the results of monitoring to strengthen the management capability of marine protected areas (MPAs)/national marine park managers in the East Asian Seas Region;
- To strengthen the capacities of institutions managing MPAs;
- To increase involvement of stakeholders in MPA management;
- To develop and implement training programmes, strategies, and tools to improve management of coral resources in MPAs;
- To act as a catalyst to leverage future funds from additional initiatives and institutions for addressing coral reef related issues; and
- To promote “best monitored and managed” MPA sites to serve as demonstration examples for other sites.

Outcomes

- 9 small projects related to coral reef monitoring, awareness building, and capacity development were implemented with the following sub-themes
  - Monitoring Coral Reefs for Better Management
  - Community-Based Monitoring and Management of Coral Reefs

Recommendations

The Small Grants Fund Programme should continue to support projects in the same capacity. The efficacy of future projects could be further strengthened by adopting a selection criterion that better reflects connectivity between the projects. The appointment of an expert consultation group to advise the selection process should also be considered to aid in the selection process.

Efforts to create a regional database should be made in parallel with efforts to strengthen individual country capacity to formulate and maintain their own databases, which would serve to feed into the regional database.

3.2 Coral Reef Mapping in Vietnam, 2003 - 2004

Objective

- To experiment with remote sensing and GIS tools in coral reef mapping in Ninh Thuan coastal waters and to create adequate premises for establishing coral reefs distribution map (large scale) for all coastal waters of Vietnam in future;

- To establish preliminary methodology and to develop an interpretive tool for coral reef habitats in specific conditions in Vietnam coastal zones. In the future, this tool will better support coral experts in designing surveys and projects on coral and marine biology studies to supplement traditional methods; and
- To establish a GIS database on distribution of coral reefs and other ecosystems in Ninh Thuan coastal waters. The GIS database will be included GIS maps and layers such as environmental parameters, biodiversity characteristics, physical and socio-economic conditions of coastal areas of Ninh Thuan. In addition, the GIS database will focus on metadata and investigated data from field trips.

Outcome

Working group, use of technology, information collection, zoning of maps to verify coral reef distribution

3.3 Demonstration Sites; UNEP & ICRAN

Objective

- Transfer of knowledge and capacity in coral reef management within the context of the three focal areas – marine protected areas, community-based management, and sustainable tourism – from the four demonstration sites to the paired target sites
- To improve capacity to manage coral resources
- To increase public awareness
- To exchange information and experiences with well-managed MPAs

Recommendations

The ICRAN Project in the Seas of East Asia has the potential to be expanded further within the region. Lessons learned from individual site management experiences and the process of knowledge and capacity transfer between paired sites can be applied to areas and sites that require management.

3.4 Green Fins Project, 2004 - 2009

Objectives

- To increase public awareness and management practices that have the potential to benefit the conservation of coral reefs and reduce unsustainable tourism practices.
- To develop a network of environmentally friendly dive operators which operate according to eco-friendly principles, as well as to support improved monitoring of coral reefs and to enhance public awareness through the various activities of the project.

Recommendations

From the Evaluation Report 2006

- Establishing a Green Fins project steering committee and appointing several key positions.
- Formalizing the network into a legal entity.
- Establish local and regional support network.
- Plan and conduct local and regional media publicity events and awareness and education programmes.

From the Evaluation Report 2007

- Green Fins management structure:

    - Nerve-center" – administrative hub, preparation of guidelines, templates, instruction manuals, dissemination of information within network, maintenance of Green Fins website, updates, conduct analysis of results, synergise results from various monitoring methods, pitch for funding from donors, link-up with commercial partners for regional level programs, etc.;
    - "Network web" – on-the-ground implementers with freedom to structure their own Green Fins implementation strategy; UNEP(DEC)/CR1 WS.2
    - "Nerve-center" can assist to develop yearly project ideas and materials that can be distributed within the network.
- Look at the possibility of expansion beyond coral reefts to cover rocky shore, wrecks, seagrass beds, etc.
- Funding:
    - Develop of seed-money to establish the different centers
    - Local level funding can be site/operator/local network dependent
    - Co-funding from divers
- Future activities
    - Harmonize implementation of Green Fins, Code of Conduct, guidelines and other Green Fins materials
    - Information on country diving industry demographics
    - 1-3 years stage-based approach in developing plan for Green Fins
    - Business plan to consider Green Fins as a business

4. Overall

4.1 COBSEA SDG Outlook

Countries identified their targets and intentions against the SDG and COBSEA Strategic Directions. It would be great to know what they are doing in achieving their goals and how we can assist them.

	National development plans and strategies linked to SDGs	**National policy/planning frameworks and targets linked to SDG targets 14.2 and 14.5 and COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022 theme 2**
Cambodia	• Cambodia Vision 2030 • National Strategic Development Plan 2019-2023 • Cambodian Sustainable Development Goals Framework (2016-2030)	• Establish Marine Fisheries Management Areas, covering 120 square kilometres in Kep Province • Mangrove ecosystems and coastal erosion targeted in Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) • National Protected Areas Strategic Management Plan (2017-2031) • National Biodiversity and Action Plan
People's Republic China	• National Plan on Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development • 13th Five-Year Plan 2016-2020	• More than 30% of marine area under China's national jurisdiction protected by marine redline system in 2020 • Improve conservation of mainland natural coastline to at least 35% of coastline •
Indonesia	• National Medium Term Development Plan 2018-2019	• Establish 6.5% of waters (200,000 km2) as designated conservation areas by 2018

	• National Medium Term Development Plan 2020-2024	• Restore more than 18,000 m2 of damaged coral reefs in West Papua • Coastal erosion and coastal zone protection in NDC • Coral Reef Transplantation in 27 locations (2018-2019) • Capacity Building on Beach Litter Monitoring for Local Stakeholders • RZWP3K (Coastal Zoning Plan/ICM)
Republic of Korea	• 3rd Master Plan for National Sustainable Development 2016-2020 • Vision 2030 • Fourth Marine Environment Master Plan 2011-2020 • Act on Conservation and Utilization of the Marine Environment	• Climate resilient ecosystems in NDC
Malaysia	• 11th Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 • Vision 2020 • Malaysia United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Framework 2018-2020	• Coastal protection and erosion in NDC
Philippines	• Philippine Development Plan 2017-2022 • Our Ambition 2040	• Increase the coverage of MPAs or sanctuaries by 20% (from 2015) by 2028; establish >100 MPA networks • Designate Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area • 10-year Coastal and Marine Ecosystem Management Program using an Integrated Coastal Management approach • Climate and disaster resilient ecosystems in NDC
Singapore	• Zero Waste Masterplan • Singapore Sustainable Blueprint 2015	• Coastal erosion and protection; reclamation; ecosystems conservation in NDC • National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (2009) • Nature Conservation Masterplan, specifically thrusts 2 and 3 on Habitat enhancement, restoration and species recovery; and Applied research in conservation biology and planning respectively • Marine Conservation Action Plan, with programmatic plans on species recovery, habitat enhancement and community stewardship
Thailand	• National Economic and Social Development Plan 2017-2021	• Establish 4.74% of its Exclusive Economic Zone as MPA by 2020 and this includes 56 marine reserves, 23 national

	• 20-Year National Strategy 2017-2036 • Environmental Quality Management Plan 2017-2021	marine parks, nine wetlands, six environmental protected areas, three non-hunting areas and one biosphere reserve • 20 areas are in the process of being established for marine and coastal protection under the Marine and Coastal Resources Management Act B.E. 2560 (2017) as well as three areas for environmental protection area • Mangrove conservation, marine conservation, coastal rehabilitation, protected areas in NDC • Marine and Coastal Management Act
Viet Nam	• National Action Plan for the Implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda; • Viet Nam Sustainable Development Strategy 2011-2020 •	• ICZM in NDC

Key Actions for COBSEA

Indicator-based assessment

- Working group on indicator assessment
- Identify common indicators among different efforts
- COBSEA common core indicators and harmonized methodologies (focus first on SDG)
- Capacity building (e.g. technical skills for monitoring and reporting, institutional development and coordination, mainstreaming monitoring and reporting at the national level including in budget process etc.).
- Guidance, building on available tools and approaches
- Integration of indicators and assessment into planning and budget

Cooperation

- Common approach to the assessment of SDG 14 in VNR reporting
- Support COBSEA SDG reporting at the global level

Technical and Institutional Capacity

- COBSEA Regional Activity Centres
- Document best practices and lessons
- Map SDG delivery support tools and organizations involved

Financial Capacity

- Prioritize development of projects that support delivery on actions identified in the SDG Outlook
- Direct support towards addressing priorities identified in COBSEA
- Address follow up and review of the SDGs in the resource mobilization strategy. Collaboration with bilateral and multilateral development agencies

Annex 3: Terms of Reference of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

I. Background

1. The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) is consolidating its work on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, resulting in the development of a COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework. The implementation of this Framework will be guided by a specialized body with significant expertise to identify key issues and solutions to improve and attain the socioecological sustainability of the marine and coastal ecosystems of the East Asian Seas.

2. These Terms of Reference describe the purpose, role, composition, and working modalities of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems.

II. Purpose

3. The COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems is established to provide guidance and support on the implementation of COBSEA work on the marine and coastal ecosystems, therefore supporting the development and execution of COBSEA Strategic Directions 2023-27 and the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework.

III. Functions

4. The Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems will:
   i. provide expert guidance on marine and coastal ecosystem governance for the East Asian Seas, including, but not limited to, marine and coastal spatial planning, marine protected areas, and the different marine and coastal habitats (e.g., coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, coastal wetlands) that will be included in the COBSEA Strategic Directions and future related projects and activities;
   ii. serve as liaison between the COBSEA Secretariat and COBSEA countries on all topics related to marine and coastal ecosystem conservation and governance;
   iii. develop biennial workplans, based on the Framework, to determine specific activities and targets to be approved by the COBSEA Intergovernmental meeting
   iv. report on the implementation and progress of the Working Group responsibilities in the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting;
   v. support in the development of project proposals and provide technical guidance and coordination on the implementation of projects and related activities on marine and coastal ecosystems; and,
   vi. establish Expert Working Groups according to the specific thematic areas of the Framework.

IV. Participation

5. COBSEA participating countries shall be invited to participate in the COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems through nomination of a Working Group focal point. The Working Group focal point should represent the national agency with lead or coordinating responsibility at the national level regarding marine and coastal ecosystems and should have relevant experience and expertise. COBSEA participating countries may also nominate additional experts to attend Working Group meetings, to ensure that the full range of national expertise and interest is brought to the Working

Group, and to enable the Working Group to take into consideration the multiple dimensions of governance of the marine and coastal ecosystems.

6. Relevant United Nations bodies and specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, as well as relevant regional bodies and organizations concerned with marine and coastal ecosystems, may be invited to participate in Working Group meetings as observers. Local authorities, private sector entities and non-governmental organizations may be invited to participate as observers on recommendation by Working Group focal points. Observers may, upon invitation of the Working Group members, make contributions on matters being discussed in the meeting and within the scope of their activities and expertise. Certain meeting discussions may be limited only to representatives of COBSEA participating countries.

V. Organization of Work

7. The COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems will function through meetings as well as intersessional work. Intersessional work will be carried out mainly by correspondence and online meetings. Subject to availability of funds, the intersessional work may be carried out through meetings of Expert Groups and workshops. The working language is English.

8. The COBSEA Secretariat will function as secretariat for the COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, including its Expert Groups.

9. Meetings of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems are held at least once per year. Where practical, meetings may be held in association with other COBSEA meetings. The Secretariat, in consultation with Working Group focal points, prepares a provisional agenda and distributes relevant meeting documents one month prior to each meeting. Meeting officers consisting of a Chairperson and a Rapporteur are elected by consensus from among meeting attendees representing COBSEA participating countries. The Meeting Chairperson and Rapporteur prepare a draft Working Group meeting report, shared with Working Group focal points for comment within one month of the meeting. The final meeting report is submitted by the COBSEA Secretariat for consideration by the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting.

10. As nominated experts, the outputs, strategies, and decisions that are agreed upon by the Working Group are considered to be in agreement of the priorities and requirements of the COBSEA participating countries, allowing the Working Group and the COBSEA Secretariat to proceed on plans and activities.

11. Costs associated with COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems meetings are covered through external funds including where possible contributions by participating countries, or from other appropriate sources, unless/ until provisions for this are made in the East Asian Seas Trust Fund.