

## Summary Report for COBSEA Regional Webinar on Draft Situation Analysis of MPAs in the EAS region



The COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022 guides COBSEA participating countries and the COBSEA Secretariat in implementing actions for protecting and sustainably developing the coastal and marine environments in the East Asian Seas Region. The Strategy contains a component named, "Marine and Coastal Planning and Management". To meet the purpose of this component, COBSEA initiated a desk study based on a situation analysis, needs assessment and regional consultations to define the scope, approach and activities for a COBSEA Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). A scoping study was carried out by a team of consultants from October 2021 to February 2022 through a desk review of existing literature, country consultations, country and expert inputs to a questionnaire, and personal interviews of relevant organisations and experts.

Preliminary findings of this situation analysis were presented at a webinar on Thursday, 17 February 2022 with COBSEA Focal Points and experts to share a draft situational analysis, invite input to support its finalization, and exchange views on possible future efforts to address MPAs through COBSEA. The Webinar served as a platform for feedback and information-sharing between COBSEA participating country representatives and MPA consultants in consolidating the work of the COBSEA Secretariat on Marine Protected Areas.

The webinar began at 13:00 ICT with opening remarks from the COBSEA Coordinator, Mahesh Pradhan, in which he shared some background on the desk study. This was followed by UNEP HQ MPA Expert, Ole Verstegeard, who presented a global overview of MPAs including that only 7.93% of the ocean is covered by MPAs, over 40% of marine species have been lost over a 40-year period, and yet the oceans are worth \$ 24 trillion and 850 million people benefit from living within 100km of coral reefs. Verstegeard emphasized that there must be full collaboration

between legislation, governance, and law enforcement of MPA protection against maritime crimes, such as Illegal, Unregulated, Unreported (IUU) fishing and incorrect waste management. He provided recommendations for how to effectively govern MPAs by using a combination of three approaches: top-down governance, bottom-up governance, and market-based governance. Currently, many of the established MPAs are facing pervasive challenges that need to be addressed. They are underfinanced, ineffective, lacking in climate resilience, and unprepared for the eco-system and community level shifts that will be necessary in coming years. Therefore, UNEP has created a MPA Toolbox and Learning Platform to assist countries and regions in developing effective and equitable MPAs.

The draft situation analysis was then presented by the two consultants, Saisunee Chaksuin and Yu Yunjun. All MPAs in COBSEA countries are designated and managed by objectives: e.g. Indonesia - biodiversity conservation, fisheries usage; Malaysia – protection of important habitats and species, conservation; Singapore Sister's Island MPA - research, education, tourism. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) and coastal zoning are used in many countries including Indonesia and Thailand. Thailand, for instance, is planning a new marine protected zone that will overlap with the MSP area to fulfil the governance gap of re-zoning the area and sharing responsibilities with different agencies.

Some countries in the EAS Region have already established MPA networks with their direct neighbours and/or have established them under the auspices of regional projects and programmes. These networks are a combination of social, ecological and administrative networks.

1. Social networks are formed through communication and sharing of results and coordination of administrative and planning efforts. This helps to increase management and administrative effectiveness through information sharing and best management practices.
2. Ecological networks are fashioned through ensuring that the natural connections between and within sites enhance ecological functions and services and benefit one or more MPAs. This type of network is based on areas that share or complement biological and oceanographic features of the MPAs and can help each site meet its ecological goals.
3. Management-based networks are designed through the creation of consistent and efficient management such as in the enforcement of MPA rules, monitoring, and awareness building.

Some examples of MPA networks that exist in the region include the Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area (TIHPA), the Coral Triangle Initiative of Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF), and the North East Asia Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN). Additional efforts to establish MPA networks have started through dialogues between countries and bilateral cooperation such as through the Mangroves for the Future Programme (between Cambodia's Fisheries Administration and the Ministry of Environment with Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources) and by Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) on dolphin, short mackerel and mangrove conservation in Trat Province,

Thailand and Koh Kong Province, Cambodia. A scientist network was established between Kep Archipelago in Cambodia and Kien Giang in Viet Nam regarding seagrass and dolphin conservation. Furthermore, there is a research network for the blue economy, MSP and megafauna in Thailand supported by China's First Institute of Oceanography.

All countries engage in some form of marine spatial planning and implement blue economy activities in their oceanic areas. These take the form of zoning areas for specific usage, while blue economy activities include mariculture and sustainable community tourism. Despite the existence of some MPA networks and efforts in establishing MPAs, challenges and obstacles remain. The report lists recommendations for COBSEA to overcome the challenges and move towards establishing more effective MPA networks that create resilient ecosystems and livelihoods and help in biodiversity conservation.

The proposed recommendations for MPA work in EAS Region are listed below:

1. Establish Expert Working Group to guide the implementation of COBSEA's MPA programme
2. Increase Awareness and Capacity Building
3. Improving MPA Governance through application of existing tools such as the UNEP MPA Toolbox and Learning Platform
4. Improving knowledge and increasing access to information for MPA network establishment and management
5. More holistic implementation of the next COBSEA Strategic Directions to include habitat restoration of MPAs while reducing the impacts of land-based pollution and climate change, in parallel with building coastal community resilience.

The financial implications to implement all the recommendations will be considerably high, and projects will have to seek external funding from multi-lateral, bilateral, and "internal" donors from within and beyond the region. Donors can include governments and development aid agencies in North America, Europe, and also from within the EAS region. Within the region, ASEAN and APEC Training Centers and the Asian Development Bank's "Blue Sea Finance Hub" are possible sources of funding. There are also many foundations that have a history of supporting coastal and marine projects in the region and specifically for MPAs, such as the Ford, Packard, Rockefeller, and MacArthur Foundations. The private sector of seafood companies and tour operators are gradually expanding their CSR work to assist in conservation projects. Actions cannot be implemented solely between UNEP/COBSEA and the member countries and it will be necessary to engage in partnership with NGOs such as WWF, IUCN, Fauna & Flora International, and Wetlands International that all have a long history of MPA initiatives. A comprehensive donor mapping activity would help to determine and obtain the latest status of donors' positions from national, international, and private sources in supporting MPA-related projects.

The countries then provided their input on the situation analysis in which nominated experts from RO Korea and Malaysia provided updated data for the report and a few other countries

expressed their approval of the report's contents. Overall, it was a successful, engaging webinar with around 30 participants from eight COBSEA countries. Philippines was unable to attend the webinar and COBSEA has since been in contact with them to receive their feedback on the report. Using the platform provided by the webinar, experts were given the opportunity to review the status of MPAs in their countries to ensure that the data is correct. The feedback received has already been used to update the study and the findings will help provide recommendations for COBSEA's future actions towards establishing a COBSEA network of MPAs. This study will be presented for consideration during the second part of the 25th Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA (IGM 25).