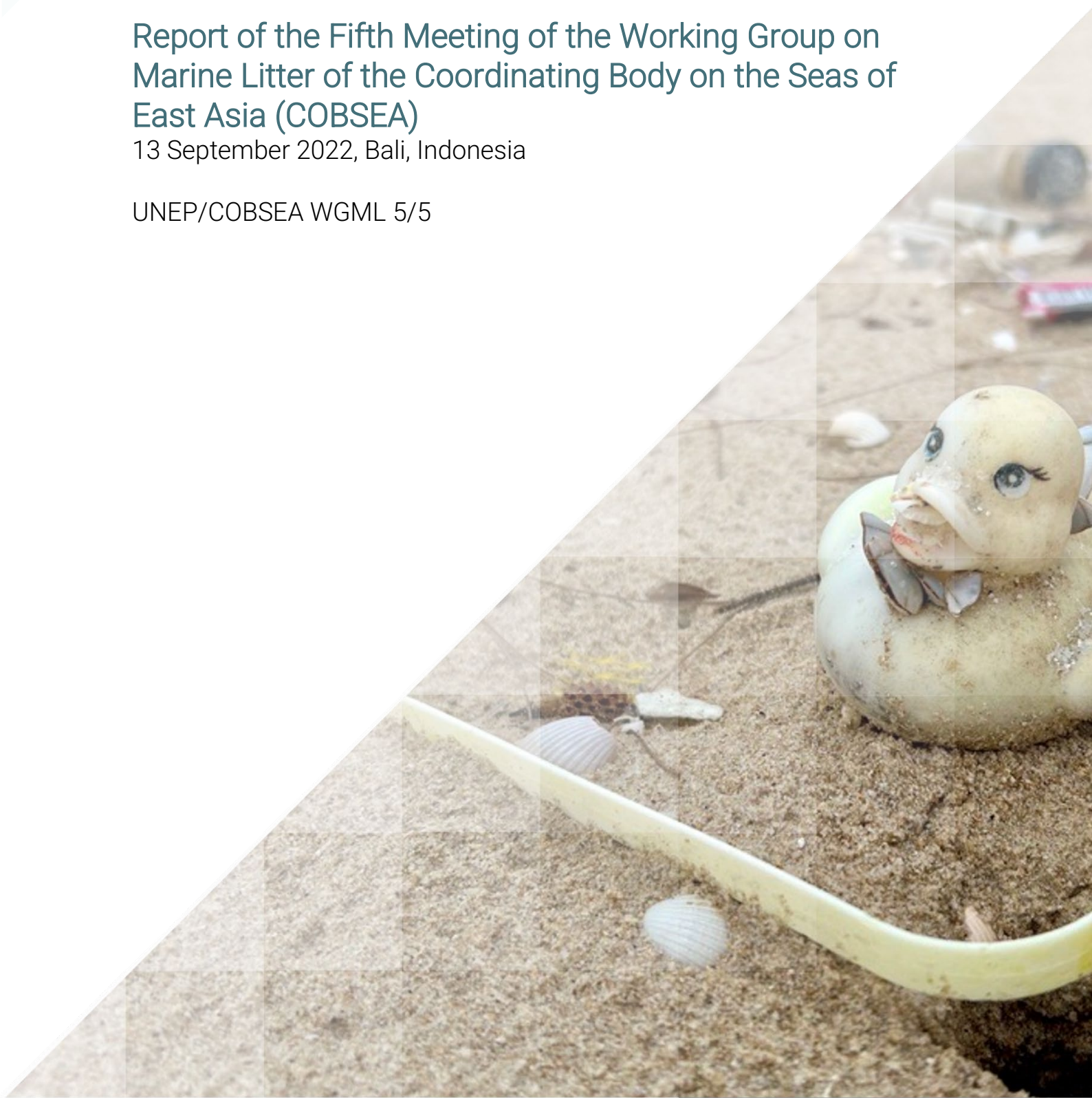




Report of the Fifth Meeting of the Working Group on Marine Litter of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)

13 September 2022, Bali, Indonesia

UNEP/COBSEA WGML 5/5



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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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Cover photo Natalie Harms

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Introduction

The Fifth Meeting of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter (WGML) convened on 13 September 2022 in a hybrid format, welcoming Working Group focal points, COBSEA country representatives, observers, and UNEP colleagues. The Meeting was to discuss progress of marine litter activities related to the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI). This report summarizes discussions and input provided at the Meeting, main outcomes and follow up actions.



1. Opening of the Meeting

Ms. Natalie Harms, Programme Lead on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter in the COBSEA Secretariat, opened the hybrid Meeting at 9:00 (ICT) on 13 September 2023. She welcomed all participants in the room and online and gave an overview of the agenda.

Representatives of each COBSEA participating country provided brief introductions and updates on progress toward national policies and interventions related to plastic pollution and marine litter, in line with the RAP MALI.

Cambodia shared progress on its plastic waste management efforts, which include adopting a plastic policy matrix and striving to improve waste collection and segregation in urban areas. The Government of Cambodia has also implemented measures such as a sub decree on plastic bag management, with plans to reduce plastic bag use and ban Styrofoam and thin plastics in the coming years. Furthermore, Cambodia is actively committed to public awareness campaigns,

surveys, and collaboration efforts with various organizations and development partners to address plastic pollution and work toward an International Legally binding Instrument (ILBI).

China presented their robust efforts and policies to combat plastic pollution. They have enacted comprehensive laws and policies for waste and plastic pollution prevention, including the significant ban on plastic waste imports in 2018. China is also actively promoting green design and alternative solutions, often with subsidies, while ensuring waste sorting and collection, even in rural areas. With an impressive collection and treatment rate of 80-90%, they are effectively managing plastic waste. China's efforts encompass extensive clean-up initiatives targeting various forms of plastic pollution and active involvement in international processes, exemplified by their collaboration with international organizations like COBSEA.

Indonesia shared progress on implementing its National Action Plan (NAP), achieving a 35% reduction in waste entering the sea by 2022, with a goal of 70% by 2025. They highlighted key regulations and priority programs for waste management and mentioned upcoming policies, including a post-2025 marine debris framework. Initiatives like donating recyclable waste to mosques and compensating fishermen for waste collection were discussed, along with active participation in coastal clean-ups and comprehensive monitoring efforts.

The Republic of Korea provided comprehensive updates on their national marine litter efforts. Government of South Korea declared an Innovative Marine Litter Reduction Strategy, focusing on underserved areas like islands and remote coastal regions. Additionally, the Republic of Korea introduced a deposit system for fishing gear, initiated a ban on new Styrofoam buoys, proposed a special bill on microplastics, and engaged in international cooperation, including ODA projects. Their national coastal litter monitoring revealed high plastic pollution in remote coastal regions, with a notable reduction in expanded polystyrene plastics, thanks to the distribution of eco-friendly buoys.

Malaysia's update included conducting training sessions and progressing toward a formal national baseline assessment. Malaysia coordinates with Ocean Clean-up, promoting recycling, and launching a mandatory fishing gear marking system to address issues related to abandoned, lost, or discarded fishing gear (ALDFG) and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, with plans for nationwide implementation by 2025. Additionally, Malaysia mentioned tax exemption and efforts to promote behaviour change as part of their recycling initiatives.

The Philippines provided an update on the implementation of its National Plan of Action for the Prevention, Reduction and Management of Marine Litter (NPOA-ML), emphasizing collaboration with local and national government units, research agencies, and programmatic clusters for NPOA-ML implementation. The Philippines conducted workshops and capacity-building activities in collaboration with partners such as CSIRO, COBSEA, and OSEAN. Challenges include harmonizing activities and data analysis to inform policies, with ongoing efforts to develop a research framework for marine litter monitoring. Additionally, the Philippines highlighted the development of a database by a university.

Singapore thanked the COBSEA Secretariat for their efforts in addressing the complex topic within the WGML. Singapore emphasized the need to enhance expertise and competencies in light of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) process and expressed their commitment to being an active voice in negotiations, including the joint regional statement. Singapore outlined six priority areas, including LBS, SBS, circular economy, research, international cooperation, and stakeholder engagement.

Thailand thanked the COBSEA Secretariat for conducting WGML-5, offering countries an opportunity to share their ongoing efforts and projects, with special thanks to Indonesia for hosting the meeting. Thailand reported on the progress of their Roadmap on Plastic Waste Management, approved in 2019, emphasizing the reduction of plastic waste and management costs. Thailand is currently in the third phase of the roadmap, focusing on optimizing plastic use, recyclability, public awareness, and research for a sustainable product lifecycle. The report highlighted the importance of interagency collaboration, science-based data, and increased collaboration for effective pollution management.

Viet Nam thanked the COBSEA Secretariat for organizing an in-person meeting that allowed for meaningful discussions and exchanges among countries. Viet Nam highlighted various guiding documents, such as the National Action Plan (NAP) and resolutions related to sustainable blue economy and plastic pollution. Viet Nam specifically stressed the importance of moving from documents to action, enhancing effectiveness in light of the INC process. They emphasized the need for interagency coordination to address land-based leakage and a focus on transboundary issues and the source-to-sea aspect in addressing marine environmental concerns.

2. Organization of work






Countries agreed to the suggestion by the Secretariat that the latter act as Chair for the Meeting, as it took place during the intersessional period between Intergovernmental Meetings (IGM). The Secretariat specified that the Meeting would be conducted in a hybrid format between 9:00 to 17:20 (UCT+8) on 13 September 2023 and provided the meeting documents. All meeting documents are available on the Papersmart Portal at: <https://bit.ly/cobsea-sep23>.

3. Progress against the biennial workplan for implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI)

3.1 Presentation of achievements and project pipeline

The Secretariat presented the progress report on the biennial workplan for implementation of the RAP MALI 2021-2022 as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 5/3. Ms. Harms noted that good progress was being made across the workplan and announced that the 'MA-RE-DESIGN: Marine litter prevention through reduction, sustainable design and recycling of plastic packaging, Thailand' project had commenced in March 2023. She invited Mr. Alvaro Zurita from the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (giz) to introduce the project.

Mr. Zurita elaborated that the project was funded by the Government of Germany and was implemented by giz, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and COBSEA until September 2025 with a very likely extension to March 2026, to account for delays. The project overall aims to support effective measures to strengthen the prevention of plastic waste leakage along the packaging value chain into the marine environment in Thailand, in partnership with the Pollution Control Department (PCD). Outputs I-III are led by giz and WWF, to reduce single-use plastic packaging, support regulation on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), and reduce pollution in two pilot sites.

Output I	Output II	Output III	Output IV
<p>Key stakeholders develop strategies to avoid and replace single-use plastic packaging.</p>	<p>Policy and multi-stakeholder process on packaging waste management, including (EPR)</p>	<p>Reduction plastic pollution by 2 municipalities near marine biodiversity hotspots</p>	<p>Regional knowledge exchange, peer learning and outreach on marine litter prevention in 9 COBSEA countries</p>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies companies avoiding single use plastics International knowledge exchange SUP award (D4R) Policy brief SUP International exchange 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guideline implement. packaging act Draft subordinated law Guideline Data management EPR Fee calculation Draft PRO structure EPR Training 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 pilot cities Plastic Smart Cities Action Plans (develop and implement) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collection equipment Business solutions, Communication/ clean ups Monitoring <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waste flow diagrams Remote sensing data 	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Development of reg. capacity and knowledge products based on project findings Capacities of COBSEA national focal agencies strengthened and lessons learned shared with key stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single Use Plastics in tourism sector Voluntary commitments 			

Ms. Harms presented that COBSEA leads capacity building and knowledge sharing activities across project Outputs, including peer learning on EPR, and under Output IV. She invited input from countries e.g., on relevant case studies, the focus on format of regional sectoral guidelines, and relevant capacity building tools to prevent, reduce, and monitor marine litter in the environment. To ensure that needs were met, and duplication of existing resources avoided, she suggested further consultation of the WGML in due course, following the Meeting.

The Secretariat presented selected products and outputs delivered under the 2025-2026 workplan, including reformatted and updated [good practice cases studies on integrated solid waste management to prevent plastic marine litter in remote and island communities](#) and related [videos](#); and the [ghost gear toolbox](#) on prevention, recovery, and management of ghost gear, including case studies, videos [in English](#) and [COBSEA languages](#), and other resources.

The Secretariat presented a paper on opportunities to strengthen regional coordination to address Abandoned, Lost, or Otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), based on recommendations from the regional workshop on ghost gear held in March 2023 for discussion and consideration for the upcoming biennial workplan and project development. Issues identified included Gear Marking and Prevention, Net Collection, Recovery, and End-of-Life Management, Regional and International Coordination, Knowledge and Capacity Building, and a Regional Framework for Ghost Gear Management.

Malaysia emphasized identifying the most effective tagging methods and expanding their use. Singapore welcomed the summary document to inform priorities but suggested avoiding the term 'regional recommendations' for the document annexed to meeting document 5-3. Cambodia raised questions about the applicability of discussions to Cambodia's artisanal fisheries and the need to promote gear retrieval, especially given economic barriers. China echoed the suggestion for summarizing issues and welcomed strengthened coordination but stressed the adequacy of addressing the issue through the WGML. Countries urged harmonization of policies regulations while considering varying national conditions and capacities. China emphasized that any regional framework developed by COBSEA should focus on priority areas to prevent overloading participating countries with unnecessary mechanisms.

Ms. Harms provided an update of marine litter monitoring support, including conducted national and regional training, national surveys, and plans for a regional assessment in 2024. She encouraged countries to strengthen data transparency and sharing and suggested that summary reports and factsheets could be made available publicly with countries' permission to show existing efforts and provide on-the-ground evidence to inform action. She confirmed that resources would be shared again with countries to this end.

Malaysia inquired about data analysis training, and the Secretariat confirmed a regional workshop on Oct 9 during the Bangkok Plastics Week (9-12 Oct). Thailand expressed uncertainty about data utilization, seeking clarification on comparisons with past efforts, and discussed International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) interest to provide equipment to support microplastic monitoring, alongside collaboration with CSIRO in 2023. The Philippines emphasized the need for enhanced site identification, priority setting, and microplastics methodology, citing issues of capacity and accessibility to sites. Countries also inquired about technology integration and best practices sharing, making these priorities for follow-up actions. The Secretariat acknowledged the importance of information sharing and potential cooperation with other partners. Key priorities include enhancing analysis capacity, addressing microplastics, and sharing best practices. Follow-up actions include facilitating training, sharing knowledge, and exploring potential collaboration with partners.

The Secretariat provided an update on upcoming events, including Bangkok Plastics Week, and INC-3.

3.2 Priorities and opportunities for biennial workplan 2025-2026

The Secretariat invited countries to share priorities and opportunities for the development of the next biennial workplan 2025-2026 and invited any comments on the current format and reporting process.

Countries welcomed the current format and ease of progress tracking and agreed to changing the reporting frequency to a biannual basis. Singapore suggested to remain as resource efficient as possible and focus on long-term sustainability and capacity in countries. Indonesia suggested to better promote the UNEP Massive Open Online Course on marine litter better in COBSEA countries. Malaysia flagged that a new workplan should include transboundary litter and addressing legacy plastic, and to identify initiatives and approaches that could be used. Mr. Zurita suggested to also keep in mind developments at global level and this could inform the workplan.

4. Preparation for the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-3)

4.1 Briefing on INC process by the INC Secretariat

Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp, Executive Secretary and Head of the INC Secretariat, delivered an update on the international legally binding instrument (ILBI) on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment. She discussed preparations for the upcoming INC-3 in Nairobi, including regional and preparatory meetings. Key aspects stressed included the commencement of negotiations based on the zero-draft text, essential comprehension of key ILBI components, and the imperative need to secure a mandate for INC-4 by end of 2024.

The COBSEA Secretariat asked for advice on how to keep moving forward in the region without prejudging outcomes of the negotiations. The INC Secretariat emphasized the importance of continuing “no regret” actions, regardless of treaty specifics. Ms. Mathur-Filipp encouraged a proactive stance, noting the likely similarities between the final treaty and the zero draft. Furthermore, the INC Secretariat commended COBSEA’s ongoing support for country preparation and emphasized the need for diverse skills sets in delegations. Each country’s voice was seen as crucial, and joint efforts were encouraged.

Thailand inquired about major concerns of member States during previous INC meetings. The INC Secretariat clarified that the zero draft offers the initial opportunity for Member States to negotiate the legal text and anticipated significant focus on lifecycle and implementation aspects. They underscored the importance of defining the treaty’s scope and encouraged timely submissions of placeholder elements. Additionally, they recognized COBSEA’s constructive efforts and stressed the significance of countries being well-prepared.

Malaysia addressed the prolonged discussion on the rules of procedure and its potential continuation in INC-3. INC Secretariat expressed the hope of focusing on substantive matters but acknowledged possible concerns related to procedure. Consultations were ongoing, and they aspired to minimize discussions by leveraging the agreement in interpretative text. INC Secretariat urged countries to read the zero draft and prepare for negotiations, emphasizing the importance of submitting by the registration deadline for logistical purposes.

4.2 Development of a regional statement to INC-3

The Secretariat provided an overview of the process for developing a collective regional statement to INC-3 on behalf of the COBSEA WGML, along with a brief background on the INC process. The Secretariat presented elements for the draft statement, based on country inputs to INC and regional priorities identified by WGML and IGM, for review and further development by the WGML. Recognizing the country-led nature of negotiations, the Secretariat emphasized its role in facilitating drafting based on country inputs, and organizing WGML Meetings as preparatory sessions for INC. Countries agreed that the statement should be given on behalf of the WGML.

Countries thanked the Secretariat for developing the draft and thanked Malaysia for giving the previous statement to INC-2. Singapore suggested that the statement to INC-3 be a bit more forward-leaning on substantive issues, rather than capturing what has already been done in COBSEA. They suggested to phrase the issue of outdated and misleading data in a more constructive way. Countries emphasized the need for establishing criteria and clear definitions including on plastic polymers and single-use/short-time use products, suggested the statement call for inclusion of fishing gear, consideration of legacy plastic and transboundary flows, as well as a circular economy approach. Countries highlighted that ghost gear and its impacts on marine ecosystems was still largely missing from the discussion and that the zero draft singled out fishing gear related only to waste, rather than from a lifecycle perspective. Other issues discussed included the importance of harmonizing monitoring and assessment for comparable data, complementarity with existing frameworks, and the need for an easily accessible financing mechanism.

Following WGML-5, the updated draft statement will be shared with countries to solicit additional written comments and input. The final draft is scheduled to be shared with the WGML by October 27, 2023. Additionally, countries are encouraged to indicate their availability and interest in delivering the statement to INC-3.

5. Update on regional mechanisms for marine pollution

5.1 The Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a Regional Activity Centre

The Secretariat presented an update of discussions with RC3S in its role as a COBSEA Regional Activity Centre on marine pollution, as established by the resumed session of IGM 25. The RAC would perform specific technical functions and activities to support RAP MALI while enhancing capacity and collaboration with the Secretariat, thereby bolstering support for COBSEA countries. IGM 25 authorized the Secretariat to develop a hosting agreement with RC3S and to prepare a Strategic Plan for approval by IGM 26. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been drafted and is under review by the Government of Indonesia.

Ms. Heni Agustina from Ministry of Environment and Forestry in Indonesia delivered an overview of RC3S's focus and key initiatives. She also highlighted RC3S's prior activities since 2019, which encompassed areas such as knowledge management, capacity-building, and the development of clean seas solution models. Mr. Aditya Krisna Laharjana from RC3S provided an update on the progress of developing and reviewing the hosting agreement and Strategic Plan in close collaboration with the COBSEA Secretariat, with the aim of obtaining approval by IGM 26.

Mr. Mohamad Kayyal from the Barcelona Convention Secretariat shared experience from the Mediterranean region. He emphasized the need for an agreement through which the hosting country commits financial/human resources to keep the RAC operational over time and highlighted that RACs were good mechanisms to attract funding from donors.

5.2 Discussion of hosting arrangements for Regional Node

The Secretariat reiterated that the resumed session of IGM 25 endorsed the formal establishment of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML and requested the Secretariat to provide interim hosting functions until hosting arrangements are confirmed and approved by IGM 26.

The Secretariat presented several hosting options, including co-hosting with the Secretariat and RC3S, considering the strong alignment of RC3S' mandate on knowledge management, capacity-building and awareness raising with objectives of the Node. Discussions were geared towards gathering insights and sharing lessons learnt from other Regional Seas Nodes.

Additionally, collaboration with regional partners was possible on specific functions of the Node, including academic and research institutions for the research database, research network, and knowledge resources. To ensure sustainability, efforts are underway to secure financial and technical support from GPML. Content development and maintenance of the web platform have benefited from existing project funds, which will be supplemented by additional resource mobilization through Secretariat and RC3S. These hosting options will be presented to IGM26 to finalize a robust hosting arrangement for the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML.

Mr. Kayyal highlighted the importance of planning for financial sustainability and provisions for maintenance and operation of the Regional Node and suggested that the Secretariat retain management of the web platform, while RC3S and others contributed content for curation.

Ms. Heidi Savelli from UNEP added that the functionalities of the Global Digital Platform of the GPML, which the Regional Node platform is linked to, were being developed further and would consider regional needs. She reiterated the continued commitment through the GPML to enable phased development of the Node platform's infrastructure.

6. Regional sharing of insights and lesson learned on priority issues

6.1 Establishing an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, lessons from Republic of Korea

Mr. Seung Keun Ko introduced the Republic of Korea's comprehensive Environment Product Responsibility (EPR) scheme. This initiative covers plastic and non-plastic packaging, as well as fishing gear. Producers have recycling obligations, while the government supports collectors and recyclers. Producers pay assigned charges, and collectors and recyclers receive subsidies. The implementing body, K-ECO, oversees real-time online data management and on-site inspections, with fines for inaccurate information.

Mr. Ko highlighted that South Korea enforces an 87% recycling rate for plastic containers and trays, imposing penalties for non-compliance, with collected penalties directed towards environmental protection. Recycling packaging is relatively more expensive than processing glass and carton materials. South Korea promotes packaging design improvements, particularly advocating transparent PET for easier separation and recycling. In 2023, the 20th anniversary of ROK's EPR initiative, its significant double-digit growth in recycling rates is notable. The Ministry of Environment (MoE) has set ambitious targets for incorporating recycled materials into PET bottles, while ROK actively develops a tracking and certification system for recycled products, gaining recognition from the European Union and other international partners.

6.2 Knowledge-sharing from relevant initiatives in the region

Ms. Kamala Ernest, from SEA circular project, shared updates on EPR initiatives in South-East Asia. UNEP is actively involved in the Global Action Partnership (GAP) for EPR, emphasizing industry and private sector engagement, regulatory support, planning, financing, communication, knowledge management, and capacity development. The GAP, slated for an October 2023 launch, initially targets packaging and plastic products. UNEP collaborates with partners, such as GIZ, WWF, OECD, and the PREVENT waste alliance to provide coordinated support to countries. UNEP is also conducting an EPR study within the SEA circular framework, concentrating on rights-based approaches and integrating informal and formal waste management efforts. The study aims to inform future discussions at INC-4, with national consultations planned and WGML's input to identify the appropriate stakeholders. The report will include data on waste pickers, informal sectors, and recommendations for integration and rights-based approaches.

Ms. Kelsey Richardson (FAO) provided an update on initiatives and projects related to ALDFG. She highlighted the GloLitter Partnerships project, a collaboration between FAO and IMO, working with 30 countries to address plastic pollution originating from Small-Scale Fisheries (SBS). The efforts included gear modification trials in Indonesia, global surveys to understand ALDFG loss

and prevention, and numerous reports on retrieval, management, and prevention practices available on the GloLitter website. Ms. Richardson mentioned plans to release information on EPR for fishing gear before INC-3 and emphasized FAO's support in integrating voluntary guidelines and implementing global frameworks. They are also developing an e-learning course on voluntary guidelines, exploring twinning possibilities, and participating in GESAMP Working Group 43 monitoring methods discussions.

Ms. Marilyn Mercado from WWF highlighted their commitment to "No Plastic in Nature Initiative" and support for EPR schemes. Ms. Mercado noted their involvement in 30 Asian cities and coastal centres, sharing good practices on Pollution Source Control (PSC) websites. She also mentioned the availability of reports and resources to assist countries in the INC process, focusing on regulating high-risk products, including pollution risk assessments, with an upcoming report on lessons learned from the city level.

7. Any other business

No other issues were raised.

8. Next Meeting of the WGML

Cambodia suggested hosting IGM 26 in Q3 of 2024 in Cambodia, potentially in Sihanoukville. They also proposed holding WGML-6 in-person immediately prior to IGM 26 to optimize cost-efficiency. Singapore recommended scheduling the next Meeting back-to-back with IGM for added convenience.

10. Closing of the Meeting

On behalf of Indonesia as the host country, Mr. Dasrul Chaniago, thanked the Working Group for the productive discussions and the successful conclusion of the Meeting. The COBSEA Coordinator echoed Mr. Chaniago and expressed his appreciation to countries, partners and the COBSEA Secretariat team for a successful Meeting.

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

1. Opening of the Meeting
 - 1.1 Welcome remarks and overview of agenda
 - 1.2 Introduction of participants and updates on national marine litter efforts
2. Organization of work
3. Progress against the biennial workplan for implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI) 2023-2024
 - 3.1 Presentation of achievements and project pipeline
 - 3.2 Priorities and opportunities for biennial workplan 2025-2026
4. Preparation for the third session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-3)
 - 4.1 Briefing on INC process by the INC Secretariat
 - 4.2 Development of a regional statement to INC-3
5. Update on regional mechanisms for marine pollution
 - 5.1 The Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a Regional Activity Centre
 - 5.2 Discussion of hosting arrangements for Regional Node
6. Regional sharing of insights and lessons learned on priority issues:
 - 6.1 Establishing an Extended Producer Responsibility scheme, lessons from Republic of Korea
 - 6.2 Knowledge sharing from relevant initiatives in the region
7. Any other business
8. Next Meeting of the WGML
9. Closing of the Meeting

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