



Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP Project)

Third Meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee

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STATUS AND PROGRESS OF SCS SAP PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL



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Since the Second RSTC meeting in July 2024, the following activities and events were undertaken and achieved at regional and national level, in collaboration and cooperation with national implementing partners and regional organizations.

Project Cooperation Agreements

Project Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Cambodia, China, and Thailand for national execution of Component 1 have been signed in late 2022 and amended in June 2023 to extend the duration of the agreement and activity timelines until June 2024, following the approved first extension of the project. This starts the full implementation and execution of national and site level activities by the national implementing partners in Cambodia (Ministry of Environment), China (South China Institute of Environmental Sciences-Ministry of Ecology and Environment) and Thailand (Department of Marine and Coastal Resources-Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment). The second amendment of the PCAs have been signed in June 2024, adjusting and extending the agreement duration and activity timelines for two years until June 2026 with Cambodia and China integrating the implementation of Components 2 and 3. Thailand opted for an extension of one year until June 2025 to complete all the activities of Component 1, with a plan to extend the agreement for another year to cover the implementation of Components 2 and 3 activities. Activities implemented include the review and assessment of policies and regulations including public hearings and consultations, surveys and mapping including collection of data and baseline information, TDA/SAP development and updating, information, education and awareness campaign including signboards installation and waste collection, habitat management including management plan development, enrichment planting and replanting and working group establishment, training workshops and capacity building activities, coastal cleanups and patrolling, aside from the regular coordination and consultations by implementing partners with stakeholders.

The PCAs with Indonesia, Philippines and Vietnam have been delayed due to national events resulting to government restructuring, change of leaderships and mandates of agencies that would execute the project, and the internal consultation, coordination and approval process have caused significant delays in the finalization and signing of agreements. Bilateral meetings, calls and missions with the national lead agencies of Indonesia (Ministry of Environment and Forestry), Philippines (Department of Environment and Natural Resources) and Vietnam (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment) have been carried out to address issues and concerns on the project agreements and execution arrangements.

In the Philippines, the PCU together with the National Coordinator have explored other execution modalities due to the decision of DENR leadership not to pursue the project. Discussions have been carried out with the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands (SCPW) who agreed as implementing partner, resulting to the review and finalization of the Grant Support Agreement (GSA). In November 2024, the Philippines through SCPW as implementing partner has signed the GSA with UNOPS. Immediate activities undertaken includes the organization and conduct of the first project team meeting with the implementing partners and focal points to discuss and clarify the implementation and execution arrangements and requirements, engagement of project staff and consultants, courtesy calls and meetings at project sites with local partners, and organization of the national inception workshop and first project steering committee meeting in March 2025. Recently, the new leadership at DENR has reaffirmed and renewed its commitment to supporting the project and its activities.

The Indonesia Grant Support Agreement (GSA) with the Bogor Agricultural University-Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies has been finalized but awaiting the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between UNOPS and Ministry of Environment (MOE), which will serve as umbrella agreement. The

MOU signing was delayed due to the national election resulting to restructuring and reorganization of the MOE (formerly Ministry of Environment and Forestry) and changes/appointments of ministry officials who will sign the MOU. On 2 May 2025, the MOU and GSA have been signed by MOE and CCMRS, respectively.

In the case of Vietnam, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) as the national lead agency has assigned the Vietnam Environmental and Marine Science Institute (VEMSI) as the national executing agency to coordinate and execute the project, including the finalization of the project document and PCA, following the internal processes of MONRE to get the project approved by the government. In November 2024, the project was approved for implementation by the office of the Prime Minister while the project document was approved by the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment (MAE) in April 2025. There was a delay in the project document approval due to the merging of ministries (MONRE and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development), resulting to restructuring and reorganization and changes of ministry officials. The PCA has been finalized and awaiting the approval of MAE for VEMSI to sign the agreement by August 2025. Unfortunately, the cooperation agreement was not signed and will no longer be pursued. The budget will be reallocated to support other project activities to include specific priority activities proposed by Vietnam.

TDA and SAP Updating Process

Development and updating of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and the Strategic Action Programme (TDA/SAP), a key output of the project is ongoing. Regional and National TDA/SAP Teams have been established to work on the TDA/SAP updating process. Dr. Liana Talaue-McManus is the overall lead and socio-economic and climate thematic consultant, together with the other TDA/SAP thematic consultants: Dr. Gil Jacinto (Pollution), Dr. Somboon Sriraksophon (Fisheries), Dr. Megan Knight (Governance) with support from Dr. Vo Si Tuan (Ecosystems). National consultations and follow-up meetings were organized in February and April 2025 to guide the national teams in developing their national TDA updating. All TDA teams, regional and national, have completed their respective indicator assessments and are expected to complete their respective draft TDA reports by November/December 2025. A regional meeting will be organized in January 2026 to launch the TDA reports as well as initiate the SAP development process. The TDA launching will bring together the regional and national TDA teams to present their respective national and regional TDA reports with the recommended and priority actions that would make up the national and regional SAP reports.

Small Grants Programme Initiative

The SCS-SAP Small Grants Programme or Seas of East Asia Grants (SEA:GRANTS) has been launched in March 2025 with the call for proposals on Innovation and Management Efforts for Marine and Coastal Ecosystems in the Seas of East Asia. Open to all SCS-SAP participating countries, this initiative is a 12-18 months period of implementation with funding support ranging from 5,000-50,000 USD, focusing on community-based conservation initiatives and research. Seven SEA:GRANTS recipients have signed their contracts and commenced implementation in October 2025. This constitutes the first phase of the proposed regional financial facility - Seas of East Asia Partnership United towards a Financing Facility for Environmental Restoration and Conservation (SEA:PUFFER), a financing facility that would facilitate an accessible steady flow of funds for effective, equitable, and transparent allocation of resources for marine and coastal restoration and conservation. The second phase of this initiative involves the review and development of a financing facility, and engagement with private sector and donors, including ensuring a flow of investment towards the financing facility, which is envisioned to extend beyond the lifetime of the SCS-SAP Project. A consultant has been engaged and currently developing the financing facility.

Knowledge Management Initiative

Initiated the Seas of East Asia: Learning Exchange and Resource Network (SEA:LEARN), a regional knowledge management platform and gateway to authoritative resources on coastal and marine management in the region.

This platform aims to address current gaps in data sharing, integration, and collaboration across countries and stakeholders by providing streamlined access to vital marine conservation data, best practices, and knowledge, drawing inspiration from the long-running Global Environment Facility's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (GEF IW:LEARN) platform. A Communication and Knowledge Management Consultant has been engaged and actively supporting this initiative, which will be carried out in collaboration with the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), which is set to integrate and sustain the platform. A consultant is currently being engaged to develop and implement the SEA:LEARN platform.

Meetings and Events

Participated at the 10th GEF Biennial International Waters Conference (IWC10) in Montevideo and Punta del Este, Uruguay from 21-26 September 2024 where the project participated in pre-conference and conference sessions and workshops on various topics such as project management, communications, sustainable funding and financing, source-to-sea approach, regional ocean governance, MPA networking, transboundary MSP, tourism and SDG reporting. The main take-aways emphasized throughout the conference, from day one to closing were: integration, sustainability, innovation, transformation, inclusion, policy coherence, 'whole-of-society' approach, and sustainable financing. At the sideline, the project participated at the first UNOPS Interproject meeting where three UNOPS GEF IW projects – SCS-SAP, Gulf of Mexico and PROCARIBE+, gathered to share and learn about the projects on knowledge management, regional governance, and TDA/SAP process including best practices and efforts for collaboration.

In collaboration with COBSEA, participated at the 2nd meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and the 26th Intergovernmental Meeting from 21-25 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia. This is to ensure the integration and long-term sustainability of project activities after project completion such as the development and updating of TDA and SAP, development of knowledge management and regional cooperation mechanism, and linkages of regional working groups.

Organized and conducted the Second SCS-SAP Project Team Retreat from 26-27 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia to discuss and assess project progress and performance and challenges including planning for next Project Steering Committee in March 2025. The project team retreat was participated in by UNEP, UNOPS and COBSEA colleagues to ensure alignment and integration of project activities with global and regional commitments.

Participated at the PEMSEA East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2024 from 6-8 November 2024 in Xiamen, China, where the SCS-SAP Project and COBSEA co-organized a session on "Tackling the Triple Planetary Crises in the East Asian Seas Region - Climate Change Impacts; Nature and Marine Biodiversity Loss; Marine Pollution" on 7 November 2024. The objective of the session is to encourage collaborative efforts amongst regional marine organizations in the East Asian Seas (COBSEA, PEMSEA, ACB, IUCN, IOC/WESTPAC) to address the triple planetary crises, resulting to a roadmap and working paper on potential collaborative effort, complete with objectives, activities and timelines.

Organized and conducted the Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Land-Based Pollution in Shenzhen, China from 11-12 November 2024 where it discussed the status and progress of the preparation and implementation of land-based pollution activities at national level, including the targets and activities and execution arrangements, and the requirements for the development and updating the LbP component of the TDA and SAP. The meeting was followed by a site visit to Shenzhen's Maozhou River Biodiversity Section and Yang Chong River where participants met and discussed with local authorities the activities and achievements to improve the river. Also visited the Belt and Road Environmental Technology Exchange and Transfer Center, a green innovation platform for the development of green and low-carbon technology innovation where it presented the Shenzhen Land Pollution Control Best Practices.

Participated at the 10th Asian Wetland Symposium from 25-28 November 2024 in Manila, Philippines, which was co-organized by the Society for the Conservation of the Philippine Wetlands (SCPW). The symposium served as a platform for wetland stakeholders to share knowledge and experience on wetland conservation and management which contributes to a project output on the documentation of best practices on wetlands management in the region. At the symposium, PCU and SCPW discussed and clarified the activities and execution arrangements and requirements of the project.

A SCS-SAP Project and Kasetsart University Day was organized on 17 January 2025 at the Faculty of Fisheries to discuss and identify opportunities for collaboration between the project and university stakeholders and students including developing collaboration plan for implementation. The event brought together over 70 participants, including undergraduate and PhD students, faculty members, and professionals from key environmental organizations.

Participated at the National Green Fins Workshop on 18-19 February 2025 in Jakarta, Indonesia organized by the Reef World Foundation and COBSEA which brings together stakeholders from Indonesian government agencies and the global Green Fins network to create a roadmap for Green Fins implementation in Indonesia based on experiences in sustaining the Green Fins initiative at regional and global level.

Co-organized the First Asian Regional Dialogue on Seagrass and Dugong Conservation: From Gaps to Impactful Action from 20-21 February 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, in collaboration with the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS), COBSEA and H.R.H. Sirivannavari Thai Coral Reef and Marine Life Conservation Foundation. The dialogue convened government representatives, policymakers, technical experts, and conservation practitioners from over ten countries in Asia to share knowledge, build capacity, and explore actionable strategies for seagrass conservation, restoration, and ecosystem services. It showcased recent achievements from the Seagrass Ecosystem Service and the SCS SAP Projects while fostering international cooperation among governments, NGOs, and local communities.

Participated at the National Inception Workshop and Project Steering Committee Meeting of the Philippine component of the SCS-SAP Project from 27-29 March 2025 in Manila, Philippines. Organized by the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands, the workshop kickstarts the full implementation of the project where local stakeholders and partners participated to discuss and prepare the detailed work and financial plan of project sites, including partnerships and opportunities for cooperation.

Participated at the Our Ocean Conference from 28-30 April 2025 in Busan, Republic of Korea. The conference aims to make significant progress in the next decade by highlighting the need to transition from an "ocean in crisis" to an "ocean of hope" through the delivery of smart, concrete, and intuitive governance actions. At the conference, the SCS-SAP Project co-organized with COBSEA and PEMSEA the Regional Collaborative Network of MPA Networks for the East Asian Seas, a side event which aims to map regional initiatives in supporting the 30x30 target with the aim of forging MPA and collaborative Networks for collective action. The side event was participated in by representatives from ACB, BNA, COBSEA, CTI, IOC-WESTPAC, IUCN, NEAMPAN, PEMSEA and SCS-SAP Project.

The Third Meeting of the Project Steering Committee was organized from 7-8 May 2025 in Manila, Philippines to discuss the project progress and implementation at regional and national levels, the findings and recommendations of the Mid-Term Review of the project, and the implementation and progress of the TDA/SAP process. The PSC members renewed their support for the SCS SAP Project and its activities particularly on the extension of the project until 2027, the integration of the Fisheries Refugia project, the recommendations of the Mid-Term Review, the TDA/SAP progress and schedules, and the new workplan and budget including the new approach and key deliverables/milestones.

Participated at the 24th Annual Consultative Meeting on Large Marine Ecosystems and Coastal Partners (LME24) from 14-16 May 2025 in Athens, Greece where the project, together with COBSEA and Gulf of Mexico LME Project, connected and shared with the broader LME community their key achievements and challenges. The event titled "Thirty years of LME Collaboration: Advancing Policy Coherence and Integration" provided and fostered dialogue, knowledge exchange, and forged new strategic partnerships for sustainable marine management globally.

Participated at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference from 9-13 June 2025 in Nice, France where the SCS SAP project together with nine regional organizations in the East Asian Seas region collaborated and co-organized a side event entitled Scaling collective action for 30x30: The East Asian Seas Regional Collaborative Network of MPAs on 9 June 2025. The event responds to Cambodia's call for greater regional collaboration at the PEMSEA EAS Congress in Xiamen in November 2024 and aligns with the discussions from stakeholder planning and alignment workshops at the 10th Our Ocean Conference in Busan in April 2025. The side event highlighted the Regional MPA Network as a platform for joint action, knowledge exchange, and capacity building to accelerate progress toward SDG14 and 30x30. Regional actors presented the approaches for connected, inclusive, and effective marine protection across the EAS region.

Organized the Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Habitats (Mangroves, Coral Reefs, Seagrass and Wetlands) on 11-12 August 2025 in Iloilo City, Philippines. The second meeting of RWG-Habitats marks the first onsite meeting of the working groups since the first inaugural virtual RWG meeting in December 2021. The meeting combined and brought together all four working groups in one meeting/venue to provide an opportunity for discussions and collaborations across the habitats, recognizing that conservation initiatives impact across ecosystems. The meeting discussed the TDA development process, the establishment of an SCS/GOT network of coastal and marine areas, and the integration of the SCS SAP RWG with the COBSEA WGMCE.

As part of the working group integration, participated at the Third Meeting of Working Group on Marine and Coastal Environment (WGMCE-3) of COBSEA on 13 August 2025 in Iloilo City, Philippines to present the project's key deliverables and explore synergies to integrate it into COBSEA's framework, ensuring long-term sustainability of project activities. The meeting was followed by a field trip co-organized by COBSEA, DENR/BMB, ACB, SCS SAP Project and ZSL on 14 August 2025 to learn best practices on mangroves conservation and restoration efforts from locally managed marine protected areas.

Participated at the knowledge sharing and exchange workshop on Understanding and Accelerating Actions on OECMs in the Marine and Coastal Areas of East Asian Seas jointly organized by COBSEA and ACB on 15-16 August 2025, Iloilo City, Philippines. The workshop enabled the participating countries to share the status of their work on OECMs including best practices in the marine and coastal areas.

Co-organized with PEMSEA a learning exchange and study tour for SCS SAP local site managers in conjunction with the 2025 PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia on 16-18 September 2025 to enhance their knowledge and skills, facilitate connections between local government officials and site managers and strengthen collaboration between SCS SAP and PEMSEA to support long-term regional sustainability efforts. An SCS SAP Roundtable Session was organized on 17 September 2025 where the site managers from SCS SAP participating countries presented and shared their achievements, experiences and best practices on integrated management approaches at site level.

Participated in the Asia Pacific Workshop on Accelerating the Implementation of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through an Integrated and Synergistic Approach on 7-10 October 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Co-Organized by UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and CBD Secretariat, the workshop aims to provide an overview of the status of NBSAP revision and implementation in the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting successful examples of integrated and synergistic implementation, as well as remaining needs and priorities, including

promoting knowledge sharing on the interconnections between biodiversity, food systems, health and climate change, and exchange on policy entry points and synergies across these key sectors as well as relevant MEAs for implementation of NBSAPs and the KMGBF.

Participated at the Second IOC/WESTPAC Workshop on Marine Spatial Planning – Accelerate Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific on 14-16 October 2025 in Chonburi, Thailand to review the current progress and challenges, and chart the course for the marine spatial planning in the region through the Regional Action Framework for Marine Spatial Planning (2025–2030). The workshop strengthened cooperation and knowledge sharing among regional organizations and initiatives on marine spatial planning.

Participated at the Regional Inception Meeting of the Promoting the Blue Economy and Strengthening Fisheries Governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (GoTFish Project) on 18-19 November 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Organized by SEAFDEC, the inception meeting marks the official start of the GoTFish Project implementation bringing together key partners and stakeholders, primarily to introduce the project's framework and objectives as well as discuss and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Participated in the 6th SEA of Solutions Forum from 16-17 December 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Co-organized by UNEP ROAP and COBSEA, the Forum brings together stakeholders, including government representatives, experts, the private sector and youth, to tackle plastic pollution and marine litter. This year's Forum follows up the key discussions on how to support countries in the region under the slogan “Partnerships and Solutions for Plastic Pollution”.

Project Mid-Term Review

As a requirement of GEF and UNEP, a Mid-Term Review was conducted from February/March 2025 by Mr. Peter Whalley, engaged by UNOPS to do the review. The purpose of the review is to enable the members of the Project Steering Committee, the Project Coordination Unit, the Executing Agency (UNOPS) and GEF Implementing Agency (UNEP), and local, national and regional partners to assess the project progress to date and to identify any corrective actions needed including lessons learned for future projects. The final report with the findings and recommendations was submitted and shared with all project partners and stakeholders in April 2025, and presented and approved at the Third Meeting of the Project Steering Committee on 7-8 May 2025 in Manila, Philippines.

Project Management and Coordination

Recruited and engaged project staff and consultants to support the SCS-SAP project and COBSEA activities and integration, the development and updating of TDA/SAP, the knowledge management and communication activities, and the development of the financing facility mechanism.

Engagement of National Coordinators for Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, China and Viet Nam have been extended to provide project management and technical support to the project and national teams in development and implementation of national activities. Bi-weekly National Coordinators meetings with UNOPS and PCU teams were organized and regularized to guide and monitor the project progress and concerns at national level.

PCU and National Coordinators have participated and provided presentations and inputs in project coordination and consultation meetings and site visits organized by the project and implementing partners on matters related to execution arrangements and requirements, development and amendment of cooperation framework (MOU) and agreements (PCA and GSA), development and finalization of workplans, activities and budgets for all components, monitoring and tracking implementation progress including reporting, among others. Missions and visits were organized to present and discuss the project, its progress and concerns.

Travel support provided to the National Coordinators to facilitate and speed up project implementation and execution process particularly the review and signing of the project agreements (PCAs and GSAs) including execution arrangements, coordination and consultation meeting with national lead agencies and partners, participation in training workshops and events, and monitoring and visits to project sites.

In consultation with UNEP and UNOPS, the project's workplan and budget are being revised and finalized following the approval of the project extension until 2027 at the Third Meeting of the Project Steering Committee in May 2025 in Manila, Philippines.

Established and maintained the SCS-SAP Project office at the Kasetsart University-Faculty of Fisheries. The office houses the Project Coordination Unit and various reports and publications (printed and electronic) produced during the first phase of the project.

Project website (<https://scssap.org/>) and social media accounts ([Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)) maintained and updated, and contributed news articles for the GEF IW Portfolio Bulletin. A web system and technology update were undertaken including a facelift and content restructuring to reflect the project's activities and achievements. The project's Facebook page followers grew due to active, regular outreach campaigns. Updates on project events and country-level activities were posted. A major upgrade is planned for the reporting period for even wider reach. Similarly, the LinkedIn page followers grew.