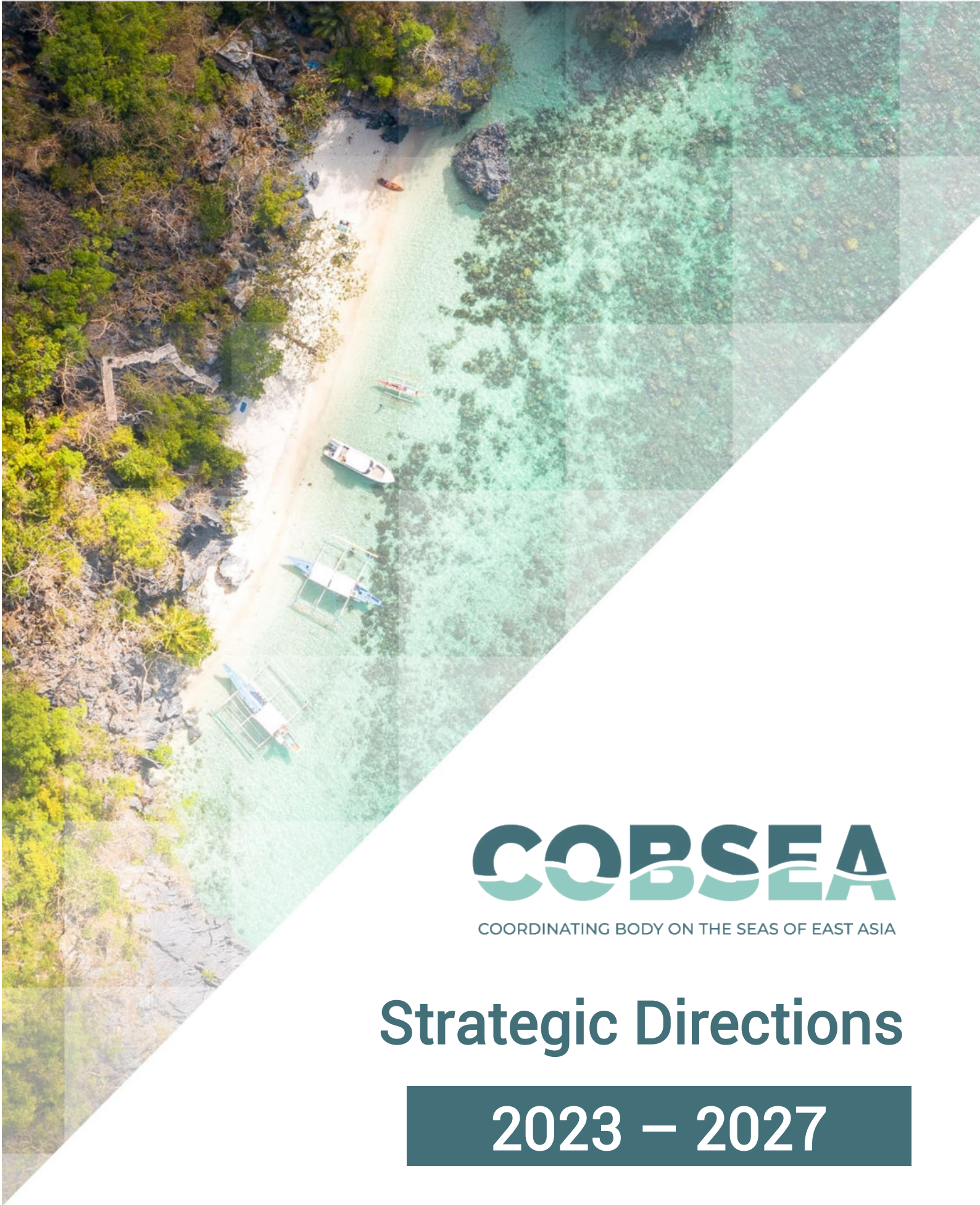

COBSEA

COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA

Strategic Directions

2023 – 2027

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ALDFG	Abandoned, Lost, or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear
APAN	Asia Pacific Adaptation Network
APEC	Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation
AR6	Sixth Assessment Report
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATSEA	Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
CRI	Climate Risk Index
CTI-CFF	Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs Fisheries and Food Security
EAS	East Asian Seas
EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAN	Global Adaptation Network
GBF	(Kunming-Montreal) Global Biodiversity Framework
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPML	Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter
IGM	Intergovernmental Meeting
INC	Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
MCE	Marine and Coastal Ecosystems
MCSP	Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning
MEA	Multilateral Environmental Agreement
MPA	Marine Protected Area
MTS	Medium-term Strategy
NbS	Nature-based Solutions

NOWPAP	Northwest Pacific Action Plan
OECM	Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
PEMSEA	Partnerships in Environmental Management of the Seas of East Asia
RAC	Regional Activity Centre
RAP MALI	Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter
RC3S	Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas
RENEWSEAS	Reducing Nutrient Excess in the Watersheds and Seas of East Asia
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (of UNEP)
RSCAP	Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans
SCS-SAP	Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre
TDA	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNV	United Nations Volunteer
WESTPAC	(IOC) Sub-Commission of the Western Pacific
WGMCE	Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems
WGML	Working Group on Marine Litter
WMO	World Meteorological Organization

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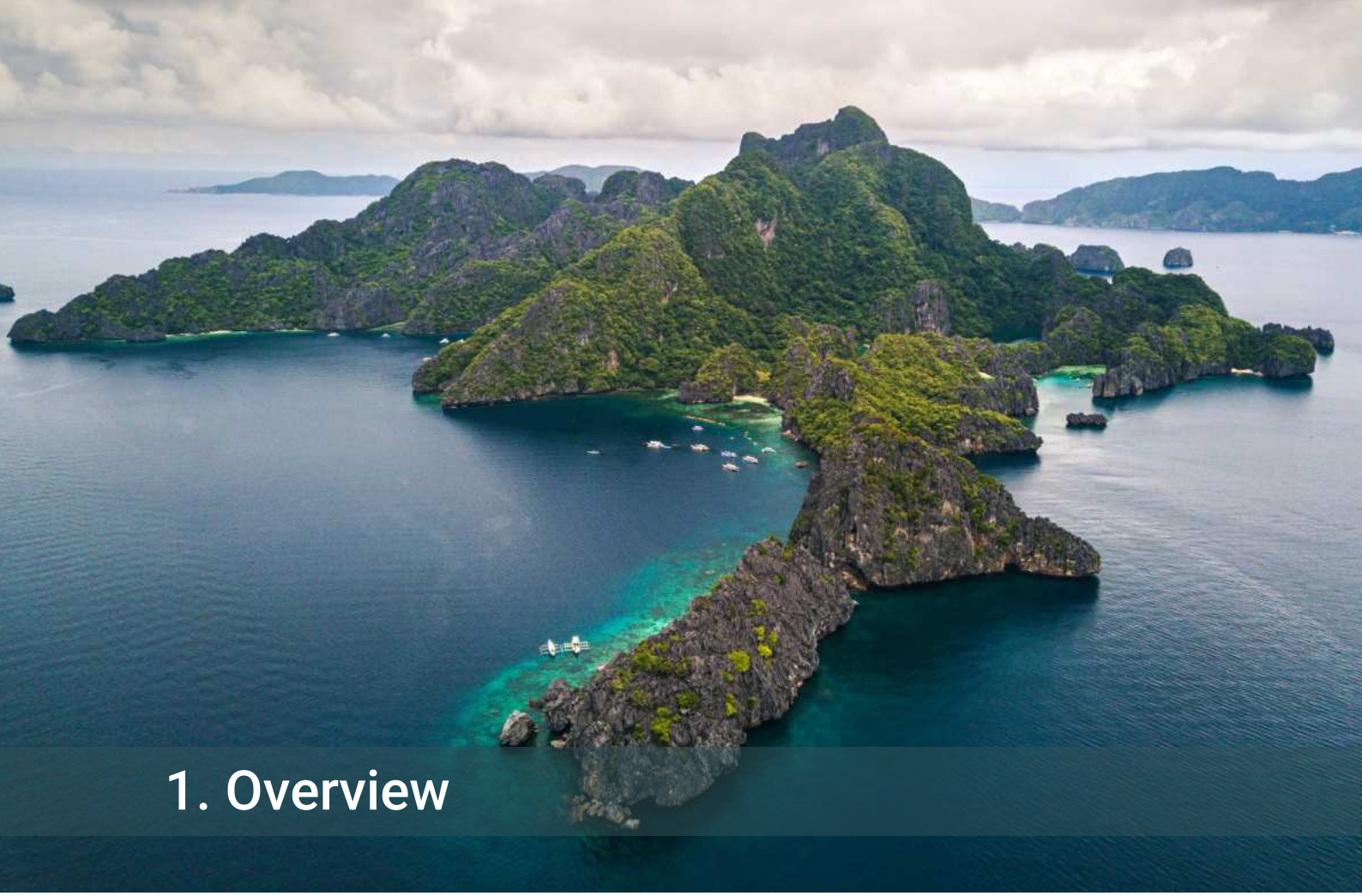


1. Overview

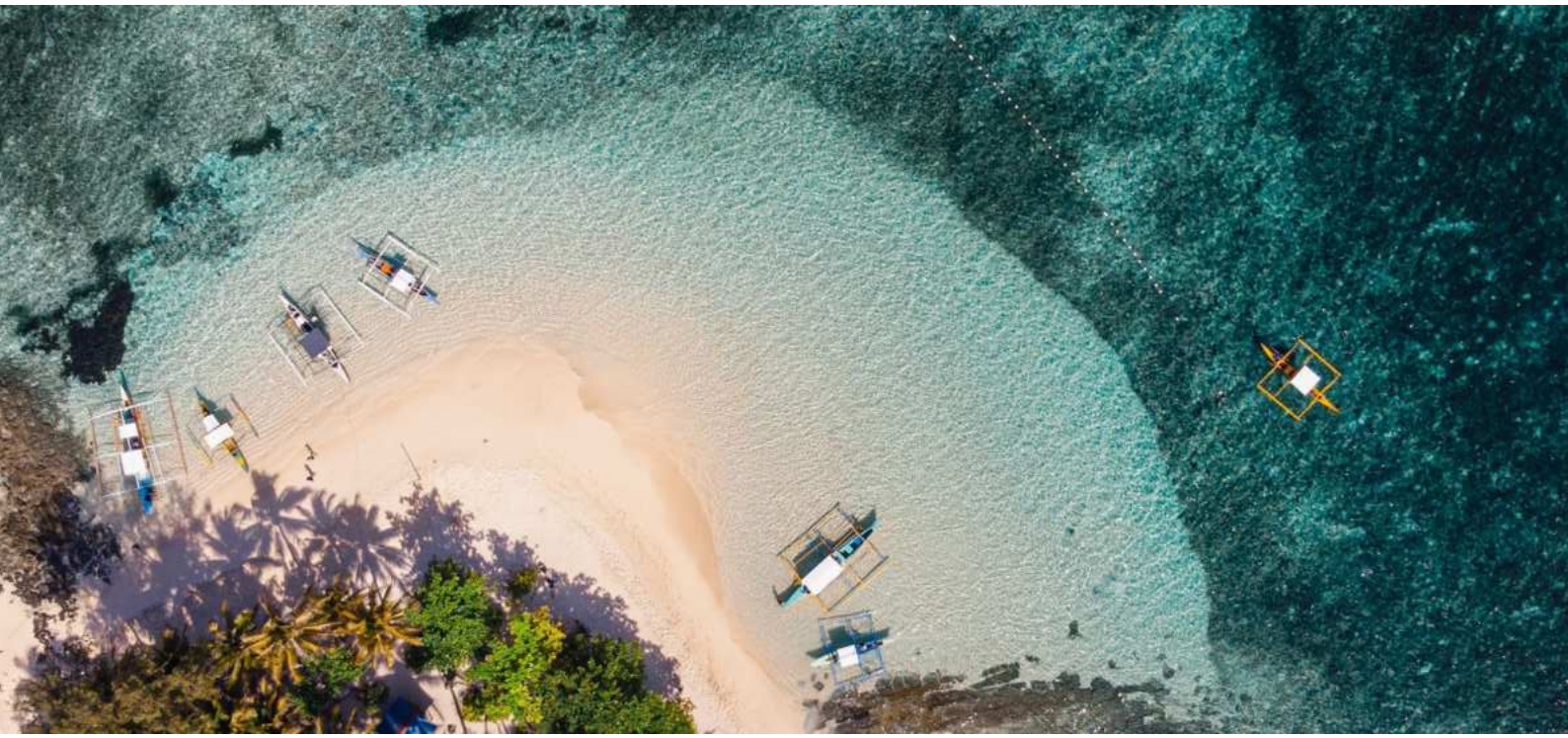
1. The UNEP Regional Seas Programme was established in 1974 to provide a regional mechanism for the conservation of the marine and coastal environment. As of 2023, more than 146 countries participate in 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAPs), providing intergovernmental frameworks to address the sustainable management of the oceans and seas at a regional level, including pollution from land and sea-based sources, integrated coastal zone management, and ecosystems approaches to managing marine resources.

2. The Action Plan for the Protection and Development of the Marine Environment and Coastal Areas of the East Asian Region (the East Asian Seas Action Plan) aims to protect the East Asian Seas marine and coastal environments for the health and well-being of present and future generations. It was formally adopted by five participating countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) in April 1981. The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) was established in December 1981 as the regional intergovernmental mechanism for determining the content of the Action Plan, reviewing its progress, and approving its implementation programme, including institutional and financial arrangements. The East Asian Seas (EAS) Action Plan was revised in 1994 when five additional countries joined. Following Australia's withdrawal in 2011, there are currently nine participating countries of COBSEA: Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The COBSEA Secretariat is hosted by Thailand in Bangkok and administered by the Ecosystems Division of UNEP. The Secretariat provides technical coordination, project management, administrative support, and supervision of the implementation of EAS Action Plan and COBSEA regional frameworks.

3. Within the mandate of the EAS Action Plan, COBSEA currently addresses land and sea-based pollution, coastal and marine ecosystem conservation and management, and regional coordination. The Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) is the decision-making body for the EAS Action plan and meets biennially. To date, there have been 25 IGMs with the most recent (IGM 25) held in two parts due to COVID-19 restrictions: an online meeting in September 2021 and a hybrid meeting in Viet Nam in October 2022.

4. The COBSEA programme of work is guided by its Strategic Directions. The Strategic Directions for 2018-2022,[1] adopted at the Second Extraordinary IGM in April 2018, focused on land-based pollution including marine litter and nutrients; marine and coastal planning and management; and governance. The Strategic Directions 2018-2022 were evaluated by an independent consultant in 2022 [2] and the resulting report was presented to and considered by the resumed session of IGM 25 in October 2022,[3] which requested the Secretariat to proceed with the development of new COBSEA Strategic Directions for 2023-2027 in consultation with participating countries for adoption by silence procedure in the intersessional period. New Strategic Directions 2023-2027 were developed in consultation with COBSEA participating countries, including interviews, a survey, a webinar, an in-person workshop, and written inputs, and adopted by silence procedure in December 2023.

5. The purpose of the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2023-2027 is to define the forward-looking strategic objectives and priority actions for the substantive thematic programmes, and cross-cutting, foundational and enabling components for the next five-year period that address COBSEA's long-term vision and mission.



[1] COBSEA (2018). COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022. Bangkok, Thailand: Secretariat of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and UNEP.
[2] Evaluation of Strategic Directions 2018-2022 and Guidance for development of new Strategic Directions 2023-2027. UNEP/COBSEA IGM 25/16, 2022.
[3] COBSEA (2022b). Twenty-fifth Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA). Report of the resumed session of the Meeting, addendum to UNEP/COBSEA IGM 25/9/rev.1.

2. Background

6. With approximately 2.3 billion people living in the East Asian Seas region,[4] the human pressure on marine and coastal resources is very high. Hundreds of millions of people in the region rely on seafood for much of their protein intake and many countries are major seafood exporters, which drives over-fishing and the expansion of coastal aquaculture. The region produces about 40 per cent of the world's fish catch and more than 80 per cent of its aquaculture.[5] Agriculture, logging and other land uses contribute to siltation of estuaries and coastal zones, and the transportation of nutrients and other pollutants to the marine environment. Disposal of industrial, domestic and agricultural wastewater are also significant sources of coastal pollution. Marine litter and plastic pollution, including microplastics, are major challenges requiring national and regional action.

7. The East Asian Seas is a region of high marine biodiversity and productivity. It has a significant proportion of the world's coral reefs (27-30 per cent) and over one third of all mapped mangroves, but the pressures on the marine environment imposed by population growth and social and economic development have led to widespread habitat degradation, with about 33 per cent of mangrove cover lost in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries in the period 1980–2020[6] and a loss of approximately 11 per cent of hard

[4] Worldometer (2023). Countries in the world by population. https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/. Accessed 15 December 2023.
[5] White, A.T. (2016). Ocean Governance Initiatives in the East Asian Seas – Lessons and Recommendations. Manila, Philippines: Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.
[6] Lim, TMS (2020). Conservation of mangrove density in ASEAN as climate action and boost to economy. Statement for International Day for Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem, 26 July 2020. ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity.

coral cover in the period 2005–2019.[7] A study of seagrass beds at 68 sites in nine countries in the South-East Asia region found that seagrass beds declined at an average rate of 4.7 per cent/year.[8] The degradation of these ecosystems results in a loss of biodiversity as well as ecosystem services and associated economic values that underpin fisheries, tourism and shoreline protection and their ability to support human well-being and livelihoods now and in the future.

8. The region is acutely vulnerable to the effects of climate change which is increasingly adding to the pressures on marine and coastal ecosystems. More frequent typhoons, floods and droughts, rising sea levels, higher temperatures, and shifting rain patterns are negatively impacting crop yields, biodiversity, forest harvests, and the availability of clean water.[9] The 50–70 cm rise in global sea levels anticipated by the end of the century will increasingly threaten the 77 per cent of South-East Asians who live along the coast or in low-lying river deltas. By 2050, daily high tides will flood areas where over 48 million people in South-East Asia now live, while predicted average annual flood levels would inundate the homes of over 79 million.[10] Rising sea temperatures increase the risk of damage and irreversible loss of marine and coastal ecosystems, including damage to coral reefs and mangroves which play a key role in storing carbon and reducing climate change impacts. At today's 1.48 degrees Celsius increase in temperature in 2023, an estimated 60 per cent of the world's marine ecosystems have already been degraded or are being used unsustainably.[11] A warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius threatens to destroy 70 to 90 per cent of coral reefs and a 2 degrees Celsius rise will result in a nearly 100 per cent loss.[12] The effects of climate change therefore present an existential threat to marine and coastal ecosystems requiring urgent mitigation and adaptation policy decisions and actions at global, regional and national levels.

9. The challenge facing COBSEA participating countries individually and collectively in the next five years and beyond is to strengthen national and regional policy and governance frameworks to address the climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution planetary crises identified by UNEP in its Medium-term Strategy (MTS) and take action to halt and, where possible, reverse the decline of the marine and coastal environment.

[7] Souter, D, Planes, S, Wicquart, J, Logan, M, Obura, D, Staub, F (eds) (2021). Status of coral reefs of the world: 2020 report. Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) and International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI). DOI: 10.59387/WOTJ9184.

[8] Sudo, K, Quiros, TEAL, Prathep, A, Luong, CV, Lin, H-J, Bujang, JS, Ooi, JLS, Fortes, MD, Zakaria, MH, Yaakub, SM, Tan, YM, Huang, X and Nakoaka, M. (2021). Distribution, Temporal Change and Conservation Status of Tropical Seagrass Beds in Southeast Asia: 2000-2020. Front. Mar. Sci. 8:637722. DOI: 10.3389/fmars. 2021:637722.

[9] Asian Development Bank (2023). When it comes to fighting climate change, green is golden. https://www.adb.org/news/features/when-it-comes-fighting-climate-change-green-golden. Accessed 15 Decembre 2023.

[10] Dennis, D. (2020). Southeast Asia's Coming Climate Crisis. Center for Strategic & International Studies. https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/southeast-asias-coming-climate-crisis. Accessed 15 December 2023.

[11] IPBES (2019). Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services. Brondizio, ES, Settele, J, Diaz, S and Ngo, HT (eds). IPBES Secretariat, Bonn, Germany. 1,148 pages. https:/doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3831673.

[12] WMO (2022). State of the Global Climate 2021. World Meteorological Organisation. WMO-No. 1290.

3. Strategic Directions

10. In a region of such large population and diverse stages of development, a regional approach to ocean governance is essential to achieve sustainability and enable synergies and cooperation, avoid duplication, and ensure efficient use of human, financial and technical resources. In this spirit, the purpose of the Strategic Directions 2023-2027 is i) to strengthen the role and enhance the effectiveness of COBSEA in the implementation of the EAS Action Plan, and ii) to strengthen partnerships and collaboration with national, regional and global actors, and other complementary regional initiatives.

11. The Strategic Directions are guided by global and regional strategies, including UNEP's MTS 2022-2025, the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 and other RSCAP Medium-Term Strategies. They align with relevant global conventions and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA) including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) goals and targets; the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement; and relevant United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) resolutions (see Annex).

12. COBSEA's vision statement describes what it is setting out to achieve and its mission statement describes how the vision will be achieved. Strategic objectives are also defined for each substantive programme of COBSEA's work (see sections 4 to 7). Defining vision, mission and objectives establishes a commonly agreed direction and purpose for COBSEA and a framework within which it can operate and develop. COBSEA's vision and mission statements are as follows:

Vision

Healthy, resilient, and biologically diverse marine and coastal environments in the East Asian Seas region support human well-being and livelihoods and contribute to sustainable development for the long-term benefit of present and future generations.

Mission

To support the countries of the East Asian Seas region in the development of region-specific knowledge products and tools, formulation of science-based policy, capacity development, and coordination of activities to facilitate the control, reduction and prevention of marine pollution, and the conservation, sustainable use and restoration of marine and coastal resources and habitats, as well as to contribute to climate change mitigation and enhance climate resilience.

13. The COBSEA Strategic Directions 2023-2027 are underpinned by three thematic programmes, two cross-cutting components, and a number of supporting foundational and enabling components, and will be guided by the universal principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), including the principle of gender mainstreaming into environmental management and development. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnections between these components, the strategic objectives and the COBSEA vision and mission.

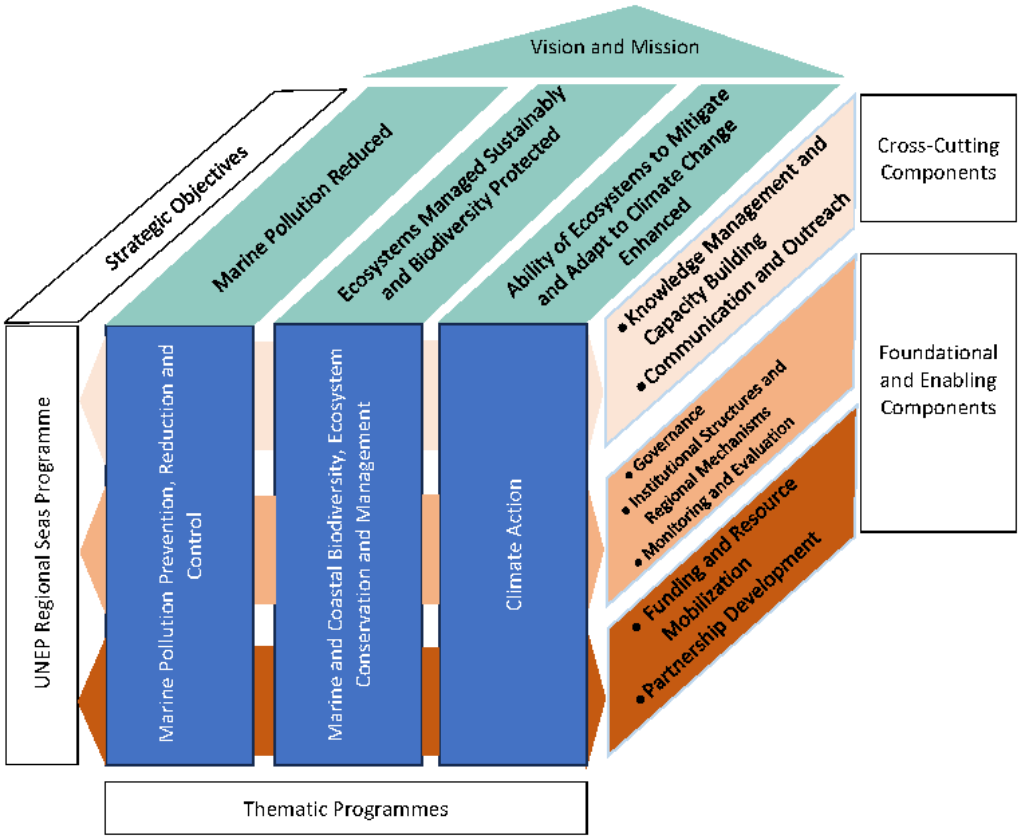


Figure 1: COBSEA thematic programmes and cross-cutting, foundational and enabling components underpinning the Strategic Directions 2023-2027

4. Thematic Programmes

14. The thematic programmes for 2023-2027 reflect the triple planetary crises for priority action identified by UN member States at UNEA-4, as reflected in the UNEP MTS 2022-2025, namely climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste. The Regional Seas Strategic Directions for 2022-2025 recognize that the complexities facing the marine environment require integration between thematic policy priorities while ensuring the promotion of ecosystem-based approaches for sustainable development.

15. To address regional priorities within COBSEA's mandate, in line with relevant international frameworks, the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2023-2027 will focus on three thematic programmes:

(1) Marine pollution prevention, reduction and control;

(2) Marine and coastal biodiversity, ecosystem conservation and management; and

(3) Climate action.

4.1 Marine Pollution Prevention, Reduction and Control

Strategic Objective: *To develop and harmonize knowledge products, tools, policies, and strategies to prevent and reduce pollution from land- and sea-based sources in the marine and coastal environment of the East Asian Seas region, based on robust evidence, in line with circularity approaches.*

16. The pollution and waste planetary crisis is one of immense scale. It has been estimated that globally around 400 million tons of pollutants are discharged into lakes, rivers and seas annually, including chemicals, nutrients, plastics, heavy metals, pharmaceutical substances, cosmetic products, pathogens and many more substances that have practical uses for humans but can cause harm when released into the environment.[13,14] Plastic litter in the Asia-Pacific region alone costs its tourism, fishing, and shipping industries an estimated $11.2 billion per year.[15]

17. Preventing and reducing pollution in the marine and coastal environment will positively impact biodiversity and enhance the health of ecosystems by preventing further damage while enhancing resilience.[16] A lifecycle approach to addressing pollution from source to sea is needed to protect key ecosystems and the services they provide, for healthy and resilient societies under a blue economy approach.

18. Addressing marine pollution prevention, reduction and control in general and marine litter and plastics pollution in particular, are widely recognized as global priorities (see Annex). UNEA resolution 5/14 established an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an internationally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including the marine environment, based on a comprehensive approach that addresses the full life cycle of plastic. Regional Seas programmes such as COBSEA play an important role in ensuring meaningful participation in global negotiations, and to provide a possible mechanism for implementation of an international instrument.

19. Recent decades have seen an increase in the concentration of nutrients in the marine environment, particularly from nitrogen and phosphorus due to excessive use of mineral fertilizers in agriculture. Excess nutrients can cause coastal eutrophication, leading to hypoxia that is detrimental to marine health and biodiversity. UNEA resolution 5/2 builds on resolution 4/14 to promote sustainable nitrogen management and encourages member States to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste globally by 2030, in line with the SDGs and their interrelated targets.

[13] World Ocean Review-7 (2021). The Ocean, Guarantor of Life – Sustainable Use, Effective Protection. Maribus. https://worldoceanreview.com/en/wor-7/.
[14] UNEP (2019). Global Environment Outlook – GEO-6: Healthy Planet, Healthy People. Nairobi. DOI 10.1017/9781108627146.
[15] McIlgorm, A., K. Raubenheimer and D.E. McIlgorm (2020). Update of 2009 APEC report on Economic Costs of Marine Debris to APEC Economies. A report to the APEC Ocean and Fisheries Working Group by the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS). Australia: University of Wollongong.
[16] UNEP (2023). UNEP Medium Term Strategy 2022-2025: The UNEP strategy of tackling climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and pollution and waste. Nairobi, Kenya: UNEP. https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/42683.

20. Recognizing the urgent need to address marine litter in the East Asian Seas region, the Twenty-fourth Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM 24) adopted the revised COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI)[17] in 2019, replacing the previous 2008 RAP MALI. The COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter (WGML) is a mechanism for knowledge sharing and coordinating action towards achieving the RAP MALI. The WGML develops biennial workplans for RAP MALI implementation, with support from the Secretariat, for consideration by IGM. The RAP MALI and its workplans will continue to guide coherent action on plastic pollution and marine litter, and resource mobilization and development of the project pipeline, to complement the Strategic Directions for 2023-2027.

21. The resumed session of IGM 25 in October 2022[18] endorsed the establishment of the East Asian Seas Regional Node of the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML) with the Secretariat providing interim hosting functions pending agreement of longer-term hosting arrangements by IGM 26. IGM 25 also established the Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) in Bali, Indonesia, as the first COBSEA Regional Activity Centre (RAC) to support the implementation of the RAP MALI. The Regional Node and RAC are mechanisms to guide effective and coordinated action at regional level towards global goals, to share knowledge, replicate good practices, provide access to best available science and data, and build capacity for harmonized approaches.

Priority Areas 2023-2027: Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter, including Microplastics, from Land- and Sea-based Sources

22. In addressing plastic pollution and microplastics, including in the marine environment, from land- and sea- based sources, COBSEA will continue to implement RAP MALI and its four focus areas of action:

Action 1. Preventing and reducing marine litter from land-based sources

Action 2. Preventing and reducing marine litter from sea-based sources

Action 3. Monitoring and assessment of marine litter

Action 4. Activities supporting the implementation of COBSEA RAP MALI

23. Activities and project development are guided by the biennial workplan for implementation of RAP MALI and WGML. Considering current developments at regional and global level and identified regional priorities and needs related to plastic pollution and marine litter, COBSEA will strengthen efforts to achieve RAP MALI under the new Strategic Directions, in line with needs and priorities identified by participating countries and WGML, ensuring efficient use of funding. Activities align with an overarching blue economy approach to (i) address plastic pollution – including from economic sectors operating in the marine and coastal environment, such as tourism and fisheries – (ii) promote sustainable use of ecosystems and their services, and (iii) benefit the environment and economies and communities that depend on them.

[17] COBSEA (2019). COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter 2019. Bangkok, Thailand: Secretariat of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and UNEP.
[18] COBSEA (2022b). Twenty-fifth Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA). Report of the resumed session of the Meeting, addendum to UNEP/COBSEA IGM 25/9/rev.1.

24. Related to Action 1, COBSEA recognizes the importance of a lifecycle approach to address marine litter resulting from unsustainable production and consumption patterns and inadequate waste management. COBSEA will continue to coordinate with partners and organizations with relevant expertise and a complementary mandate, including UNEP and the GPML, to prevent and reduce plastic pollution and plastic waste leakage, including through waterways, in line with outcomes of the INC and UNEA resolutions. This includes promoting replication of good practices and access to integrated plastic waste management solutions in remote and island communities. COBSEA encourages countries to mainstream/integrate regional and national plans at local level, as relevant. COBSEA will explore opportunities to address legacy plastics in the marine and coastal environment.

25. Related to Action 2, COBSEA will work closely with relevant competent agencies in the UN system and regional organizations to address sea-based sources, including Abandoned, Lost, or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG), otherwise known as "ghost gear". In the coming 5-year period, COBSEA aims to expand technical assistance and knowledge on ghost gear and mobilize resources to address regional priorities and needs, including access to guidance and good practices through the ghost gear toolbox. COBSEA will promote regional coordination to address common goals, priorities, and actions.

26. Related to Action 3, recognizing that monitoring and assessment are indispensable for effective action, COBSEA will focus attention on harmonizing marine litter monitoring methods and building capacity to collect, analyse and report robust data on plastic pollution, to track the effectiveness of interventions. COBSEA will continue to provide technical assistance to develop and strengthen national marine litter monitoring programmes in accordance with *Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes*, endorsed by IGM 25 part one in 2021,[19] and to expand and update guidance as needed. COBSEA will work with participating countries, with guidance from WGML, towards greater data comparability in the East Asian Seas region and a regional assessment of marine litter status and trends based on national surveys. COBSEA recognizes that robust national baselines, regional assessments, and greater data transparency and sharing can help to shift the narrative in the region away from limited estimates to the potential for evidence-based action at scale. Marine litter monitoring and reporting is also required to track progress at global level, including SDG target 14.1.

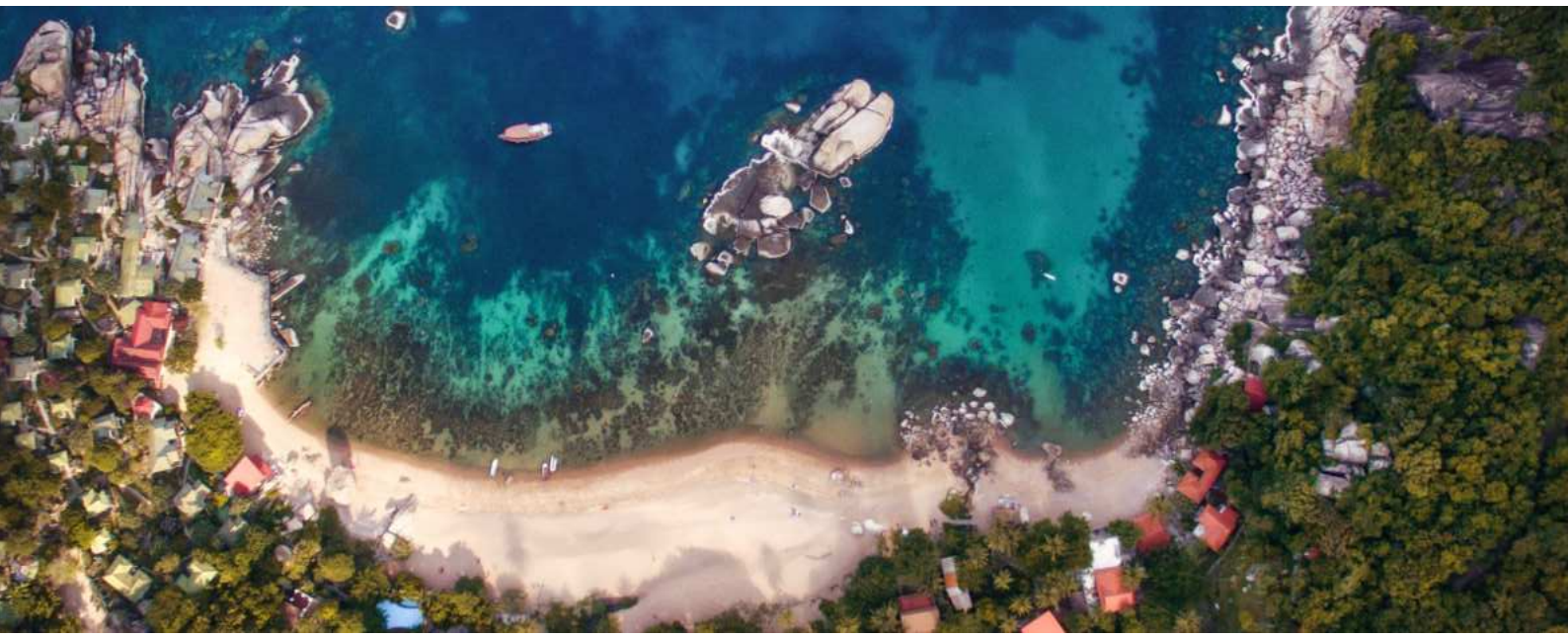
27. Related to Action 4, COBSEA will catalyse efforts that support regional and national delivery of RAP MALI, including regional coordination, knowledge management, capacity building and outreach, as well as the planning, tracking and reporting achievements of RAP MALI. COBSEA will strengthen knowledge management by further developing the East Asian Seas Regional Node of GPML based on stakeholder needs and will promote coordination of knowledge-sharing efforts in the region, including with ASEAN. In line with RAP MALI, COBSEA will explore opportunities to enhance use of the Regional Node platform to share monitoring data across COBSEA participating countries. COBSEA will work with the RC3S as the RAC on marine pollution to implement activities and build capacity in the region to achieve RAP MALI and relevant global commitments. COBSEA will strengthen awareness of challenges and solutions to enhance community understanding, promote a sense of responsibility, and drive behavioural change.

[19] COBSEA and CSIRO (2022). Regional Guidance on Harmonized National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes. Monitoring Efforts and Recommendations for National Marine Litter Monitoring Programmes. Bangkok, Thailand: UNEP.

Priority Areas 2023-2027: *Nutrients, sediments and wastewater*

28. COBSEA's mandate on reducing nutrient pollution is anchored in UNEA resolutions 4/14 and 5/2, which encourage Member States to accelerate actions to significantly reduce nitrogen waste from all sources by 2030. Sustainable nitrogen management is also key to achieving the SDGs, particularly SDGs 14.1 and 14.2, and Target 7 of the Kunming-Montreal GBF which aims to reduce excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half by 2030. COBSEA's focus on nutrients, sediments and wastewater during the period 2018-2022 was on preventing and reducing eutrophication and sedimentation and their impacts on the marine and coastal environment. To this end, the development of regional guidelines for identifying and addressing sources of nutrients, sediments, and wastewater was endorsed by the IGM in the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022. Two reports were presented to the resumed session of IGM 25 for further development and consideration: a desk review on nutrient pollution as a regional and transboundary challenge in the East Asian Seas region[20] and a draft strategy and action plan on "Reducing Nutrient Excess in the Watersheds and Seas of East Asia (RENEWSEAS)".[21]

29. In the upcoming five-year period, COBSEA will identify priority needs and actions related to nutrients, wastewater and sediments, and relevant funding opportunities, for discussion and consideration by the IGM, in coordination with relevant global and regional organizations. This may include scoping existing capacities, initiatives and capacity building needs to support implementation of UNEP's guidance on sediments, wastewater and water quality management. This may include consideration of relevant marine contaminants from agricultural and aquaculture activities, such as fertilizer and pesticides, and consideration of a source-to-sea approach to manage pollution from rivers or waterways.



[20] COBSEA (2021). Desk Review on Nutrient Pollution as a Regional and Transboundary Challenge in the East Asian Seas Region. Bangkok, Thailand: UNEP.
[21] COBSEA (2022a). Reducing Nutrient Excess in the Watersheds and Seas of East Asia – a Draft Strategy and Action Plan. Bangkok, Thailand: UNEP.

4.2 Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Ecosystem Conservation and Management

Strategic Objective: *To develop integrated and harmonized strategies, policies, knowledge products, and tools for the sustainable management of the marine and coastal ecosystems and protection of biodiversity in the East Asian Seas region to ensure a coordinated strategic approach to the conservation and governance of marine and coastal resources and a transition to a sustainable blue economy.*

30. The East Asian Seas hold incomparable marine biodiversity, including the world's largest expanses of coral reef, mangrove and seagrass, covering six Large Marine Ecosystems (LME): the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, the East China Sea, the Yellow Sea, the Sulu-Celebes Sea, and the Indonesian Sea. Demographic changes and social and economic development can impact marine environmental health and lead to widespread habitat degradation.

31. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation undermine the resilience of economies and many critical product value chains and will ultimately prevent progress towards achieving the SDGs and human well-being.[22] Several UNEA resolutions underpin UNEP's priority sub-programme on Nature Action, including resolutions 2/12 and 4/13 on Coral Reef Management; 2/16 on Mainstreaming Biodiversity for Well-being; 4/12 on the Global Health of Mangroves; and 5/5 on Nature-based Solutions for supporting sustainable development. Resolution 5/6 on Biodiversity and Health links the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and public health in accordance with the "One Health" approach. Goal 1 of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 is to "secure diverse, resilient and productive marine and coastal ecosystems" with a further aim to protect biodiversity to maintain ocean and coastal ecosystem functions. The UNEA resolutions, UNEP's MTS and the Regional Seas Strategic Directions contribute to the attainment of the SDGs and their targets, particularly SDG 14.2 and 14.5, and the Kunming-Montreal GBF targets 1, 2, 3 and 11 (see Annex). COBSEA's strategy for Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Ecosystem Conservation and Management in 2023-2027 will align with and contribute to the global goals and targets that are relevant to the countries of the region.

32. The EAS Action Plan incorporates *inter alia* activities related to scientific and management aspects of the rehabilitation of vital ecosystems and the restoration of ecologically or economically important species and communities. It also envisages the establishment of a viable network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and encourages scientific research to establish a better understanding of the relationship between the protection and utilization of marine resources and their environment as a means of improving their sustainable management.

[22] Ibid.

Priority Areas 2023-2027: *Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Ecosystem Conservation and Management*

33. COBSEA's strategy on biodiversity, marine and coastal ecosystem conservation, and management for the period 2023-2027 will be guided by the Marine and Coastal Ecosystem Framework (MCE Framework) adopted through silence procedure in April 2023. On adoption of the MCE Framework, a Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE) was established to guide and coordinate COBSEA's programme of work on marine and coastal ecosystems in accordance with the WGMCE Terms of Reference.

34. The specific objectives of the Framework are to:

- Strengthen the conservation and governance of the marine and coastal ecosystems in the East Asian Seas, in consideration of coastal communities, through the concept of Blue Economy.
- Ensure alignment of COBSEA activities on 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.
- Provide guidance on marine and coastal ecosystems activities and how these are connected among each other.

35. Blue Economy is the overarching theme of COBSEA's work on marine and coastal ecosystems, in line with UNEP's Sustainable Blue Economy Initiative, which "aims to facilitate sustainable ocean-based economic, social and environmental benefits within the planetary boundaries of oceans and coasts".[23] The Blue Economy concept aligns with the Kunming-Montreal GBF goals on maintaining, enhancing and restoring ecosystems while meeting people's needs through sustainable use and equitable benefit sharing. Moreover, Nature-based Solutions (NbS),[24] a concept closely related to the Blue Economy, is defined in UNEA resolution 5/5, as "actions to protect, conserve, restore, sustainably use and manage natural or modified terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine ecosystems which address social, economic and environmental challenges effectively and adaptively, while simultaneously providing human well-being, ecosystem services, resilience and biodiversity benefits". These approaches serve as a reference for participating countries to undertake appropriate activities according to their local circumstances.

36. COBSEA will continue to focus on themes and activities that contribute to achieving a sustainable Blue Economy and respond to the mandate of the EAS Action Plan to implement integrated marine and coastal management, including encouraging the use of Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP) as an ecosystem-based management approach to balance marine space and resources by integrating economic and social activities with ecosystem conservation, the establishment of MPAs, where relevant, including the networking of MPAs in order to conserve biodiversity and maintain productivity, and the conservation and restoration of marine and coastal habitats.

[23] UNEP (2023a). Enabling sustainable resilient and inclusive blue economies. https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/what-we-do/enabling-sustainable-resilient-and-inclusive-blue-economies. Accessed 15 December 2023.

[24] In this document, Ecosystem-based Approaches and other management and conservation approaches are considered equal to the concept of Nature-based Solutions, as acknowledged by UNEA resolution 5/5.

37. Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) have been recognized as an alternative means of conserving biodiversity and managing marine and coastal ecosystems without the need to formally establish MPAs. OECMs may already be established in the region and COBSEA will conduct a survey to assess the number in existence and their distribution, and the policies and frameworks that govern their management.

38. Ecological connectivity is a related theme that recognizes the inter-connections between marine and coastal habitats such as coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, and wetlands and the "ecological corridors" that allow marine species to move between them. For these corridors to exist and be sustainable, marine habitats need to be conserved and/or rehabilitated, and COBSEA will work to achieve this within the Framework and under the guidance of the WGMCE.

39. Across the thematic areas of the MCE Framework, community participation and knowledge management must be incorporated in the different projects and activities that are developed in support of it. This shall include monitoring and assessment as deemed relevant.

40. In addition to the existing focus, COBSEA could explore efforts on species conservation for species that are relevant to the region, in consideration of their specific role in ensuring biodiversity and ecosystem health. COBSEA may also consider managing and mitigating the impacts of invasive species to reduce their negative effects on ecosystems through monitoring, control efforts and restoration of affected ecosystems.

41. In relation to the wider sustainable blue economy discussion, COBSEA may consider the effects of certain sectors such as fishing and tourism on the marine and coastal environment, within the limits of COBSEA's mandate and in collaboration with relevant partners. This may include consideration of effects such as illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing in terms of loss of biodiversity, habitat destruction, maritime security concerns, and transboundary conflicts. COBSEA will share any emerging insights and research on substantial effects of marine activities such as tourism (underwater crowding and noise pollution) on ecosystems for country consideration.

4.3 Climate Action

Strategic Objective: *To strengthen the ability of marine and coastal ecosystems in the East Asian Seas to contribute to climate change mitigation and enhance climate adaptation and resilience, by supporting and promoting Nature-based Solutions and Ecosystem-based Adaptation.*

42. The Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)[25] reported that climate change is rapid and intensifying in every region of the world. Asia is widely known as the region most exposed to natural hazards with climate change causing more frequent and intense occurrences of extreme weather events such as typhoons and floods. Long coastlines and heavily populated low-lying areas make the region one of the world's most vulnerable to weather extremes and rising sea levels associated with global warming. According to the Global Climate Risk Index (CRI) 2020,[26] the Philippines, Viet Nam and Thailand were in the top 10 countries most affected by extreme climate events during 1999–2018. The 2021 ASEAN State of Climate Change Report[27] noted that ASEAN's high vulnerability to climate change is due to "growing intensity and magnitude of extreme weather events, and increasing economic, environmental, and social damage". Recent modelling projections show that the seas of South-East Asia may warm by 1.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius through the 21st century, with reduced oxygen levels and many other environmental changes that will cause stress for marine life.[28] The changes could have serious implications for habitats such as coral reefs and altered species distribution driven by these changes would have consequences for biodiversity, the livelihoods of small-scale fishers and the food security of coastal communities.

43. Moreover, a healthy ocean and intact ecosystems play a crucial role in balancing global temperatures and regulating the climate. Marine and coastal ecosystems play a critical role in storing and sequestering large quantities of blue carbon,[29] contributing significantly to mitigating climate change. The Blue Carbon Initiative estimates that 83 per cent of the global carbon cycle is circulated through the ocean and that coastal habitats account for approximately half of the total carbon sequestered in ocean sediments.[30] Degradation of key ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass beds and tidal marshes adversely affects their carbon sink capacity and releases stored carbon, resulting in CO2 emissions that contribute to climate change. Dedicated efforts to protect, restore, manage and sustainably use these ecosystems enhances their capacity to provide essential benefits for climate resilience and carbon storage.

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[25] IPCC (2023). Summary for Policymakers. In: Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. A Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. Geneva, Switzerland: IPCC.

[26] Eckstein, D, Kunzel, V, Schafer, L and Winges, M. (2020). Global Climate Risk Index 2020. Who suffers most from extreme weather events? Weather-related loss events in 2018 and 1999 to 2018. Bonn, Germany: Germanwatch e.V.

[27] ASEAN (2021). ASEAN State of Climate Change Report. Current status and outlook of the ASEAN region toward the ASEAN Climate Vision 2050. Jakarta, Indonesia: ASEAN Secretariat.

[28] Kay S, Avillanosa AL, Cheung VV, Dao HN, Gonzales BJ, Palla HP, Praptiwi RA, Queiro´ s AM, Sailley SF, Sumeldan JDC, Syazwan WM, Then AY-H and Wee HB (2023). Projected effects of climate change on marine ecosystems in Southeast Asian seas. Front. Mar. Sci. 10:1082170. doi: 10.3389/fmars.2023.1082170.

[29] Blue carbon commonly refers to carbon stored in coastal and marine ecosystems.

[30] The Blue Carbon Initiative (2023). Mitigating Climate Change Through Coastal Conservation. www.thebluecarboninitiative.org. Accessed 15 December 2023.

44. COBSEA aligns with UNEP's work on Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) that derives from UNEA resolution 1/8 on Ecosystem-based Adaptation and resolution 2/6 on implementing the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (see Annex). UNEP's work on climate change adaptation helps to build the scientific and knowledge base, facilitate the integration of science into adaptation policy setting and planning, and support countries to build ecosystem resilience and enhance ecosystem services for adaptation. Furthermore, UNEA resolution 5/5 on Nature-based Solutions is considered to be especially relevant to climate action as it can contribute to actions for adaptation and resilience to and mitigation of climate change and its impacts.

45. Under its MTS for 2022-2025, the strategic objective of UNEP's Climate Action thematic sub-programme is to work towards climate stability while keeping a clear focus on the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement for guiding collective climate action in line with sustainable development. Climate stability to prevent ocean acidification and sea-level rise is also a key component of Goal 1 of the Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025, which is to secure diverse, resilient and productive marine and coastal ecosystems.

46. Nature-based Solutions are considered especially relevant to climate action as they enhance the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems in terms of their ability to contribute to mitigation of climate change and its impacts. EbA is a component of NbS that describes a variety of approaches for adapting to climate change, all of which involve the management of ecosystems to reduce the vulnerability of human communities to the impacts of climate change such as storm and flood damage to physical assets, coastal erosion, salinization of freshwater resources, and loss of productivity. EbA approaches are specifically designed and implemented to achieve climate adaptation goals including resilience to climate change and lie at the intersection of climate change adaptation, socioeconomic development and biodiversity conservation. [31] EbA approaches are consistent with EAS Action Plan programme components on the scientific and management aspects of rehabilitation of vital ecosystems and restoration of ecologically or economically important species and communities.

Priority Areas 2023-2027: *Climate Resilience and Blue Carbon*

47. COBSEA will strengthen its efforts related to climate action through NbS. This includes introducing EbA approaches to enhance the adaptive capacity and resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems to reduce their vulnerability to climate change. Recognizing the work of other regional organizations in this field, COBSEA will liaise closely with the Asia Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN), the UNEP Ecosystems Division and Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), the ASEAN Climate Resilience Network and other relevant competent organizations to harmonize approaches, look for synergies and explore opportunities for institutional capacity building.

48. COBSEA will make use of EbA knowledge products and tools already available through APAN, which is a regional network of UNEP's Global Adaptation Network (GAN) and adapt these for national use where necessary.

[31] Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (2009). Connecting Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation: Report of the Second Ad Hoc Technical Expert Group on Biodiversity and Climate Change. Montreal, Technical Series No. 41, 126 pages.

49. COBSEA's work on climate action will leverage and complement, as relevant, efforts under the thematic programme on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Ecosystem Conservation and Management, in coordination with WGMCE.

50. COBSEA will explore needs and opportunities to strengthen the cross-cutting benefits of NbS to both enhance resilience and strengthen and retain the blue carbon storage capacity of marine and coastal ecosystems. Where relevant, COBSEA will explore partnerships with regional and international networks such as the Blue Carbon Initiative, and respective funding opportunities.

5. Cross-Cutting Components

Strategic Objective: *To share knowledge and develop capacity in the region to enhance decision-making and regional coordination for implementation of thematic programmes, to disseminate COBSEA resources, and to raise awareness for COBSEA efforts and regional priorities.*

5.1 Knowledge Management and Capacity Building

51. The EAS Action Plan places great emphasis on education and short-term training and the development of institutional frameworks as well as institution building. A priority of the action plan is to support and strengthen institutions that have the capability or potential to contribute significantly to its objectives.

52. The East Asian Seas Regional Node of the GPML provides a network and web platform for sharing knowledge and information products related to marine litter and plastic pollution. A similar platform could be considered for marine and coastal ecosystems, biodiversity conservation and climate resilience, as needed.

53. By providing a forum for the exchange of experience, policy and best practice related to its substantive themes, COBSEA can strengthen its regional mechanisms and, where required, build capacity in its participating countries to develop their respective national actions. Recognizing the diversity across participating countries, COBSEA will scope capacity building needs, facilitate peer to peer learning and provide training tailored to individual country needs and circumstances, in line with regional priorities.

54. COBSEA will aim to strengthen science-policy dialogue in coordination with relevant academic and research institutions and networks in the region to share research findings on priority marine environmental issues with COBSEA Working Groups.

55. COBSEA will enhance access to knowledge products, tools and guidance related to thematic programmes, including through the COBSEA website, UNEP platforms, and other relevant platforms and mechanisms, including the Working Groups. To strengthen coordination and reduce duplication, Working Group members may agree to invite observers from organizations working on issues relevant to thematic programmes to their Meetings to share resources, lessons learned and opportunities for collaboration.

5.2 Communications and Outreach

56. The EAS Action Plan stresses that the objective of COBSEA's education and capacity building efforts should be the development of sustained public awareness of marine and coastal environmental issues targeted at decision makers, relevant partners and regional organizations, and the general public. Effective communication increases visibility of COBSEA achievements and regional priorities and can facilitate better regional coordination, including through development and dissemination of communication products such as quarterly COBSEA newsletters, audio-visual outreach material, and press releases, as well as inputs to Regional Seas and UNEP communication and outreach efforts.

57. COBSEA's website is a vital medium for both communicating with its stakeholders and as a repository for reports, guidelines, etc., and it is important that it is kept up to date with news stories and outputs from project activities. The use of social media platforms is increasingly important for sharing news stories and promoting COBSEA to a wider audience. Managing communications is a specialized and potentially time-consuming function and the Secretariat may require additional resources to fulfil this role effectively, as well as assistance from participating countries to disseminate resources and information.

58. Outreach activities such as webinars, workshops and presentations at meetings relevant to COBSEA's thematic programmes should be promoted to help raise awareness, build capacity, report on project activities, and engage with regional and national partners and stakeholders. To this end, the COBSEA Secretariat will develop a communication plan to identify audience-specific materials that can be translated into national languages of the region, including related to regional frameworks, mechanisms and major initiatives.

59. COBSEA's communications and outreach activities will strive to reach and engage with multiple stakeholders and will develop outreach material that specifically targets women and children, youth, indigenous people, and local communities.

6. Foundational and Enabling Components

Strategic Objective: *To strengthen governance and partnership arrangements and mobilize sufficient resources to ensure the effective and sustainable operation of COBSEA towards implementation of the EAS Action Plan, Strategic Directions and regional frameworks, including adequate capacity of the COBSEA Secretariat and development of COBSEA institutional mechanisms to address regional needs and priorities.*

6.1 Governance

60. The overarching governance goal is to provide an effective regional mechanism for the protection and sustainable management of the marine and coastal environment of the East Asian Seas region. The implementation of COBSEA thematic programmes and cross-cutting components requires technical expertise, effective coordination, and programme management by the COBSEA Secretariat. This requires effective operation of COBSEA and its Secretariat, including sustainable financing and human resources, an enabling institutional structure, and inclusive consultation mechanisms. In the long term, it is important to maintain a sustainable alignment between existing and planned projects and Secretariat staffing and structure to support ongoing success. To ensure adequate capacity of the Secretariat at appropriate staff levels, core staff could include a Coordinator, Administrative Assistant, Programme Officers on thematic programmes, and Associate Programme Officers (such as United Nations Volunteers, UNVs, and Junior Professional Officers, JPOs) as needed (see Figure 2: Envisaged COBSEA Secretariat structure in 2023-2027).

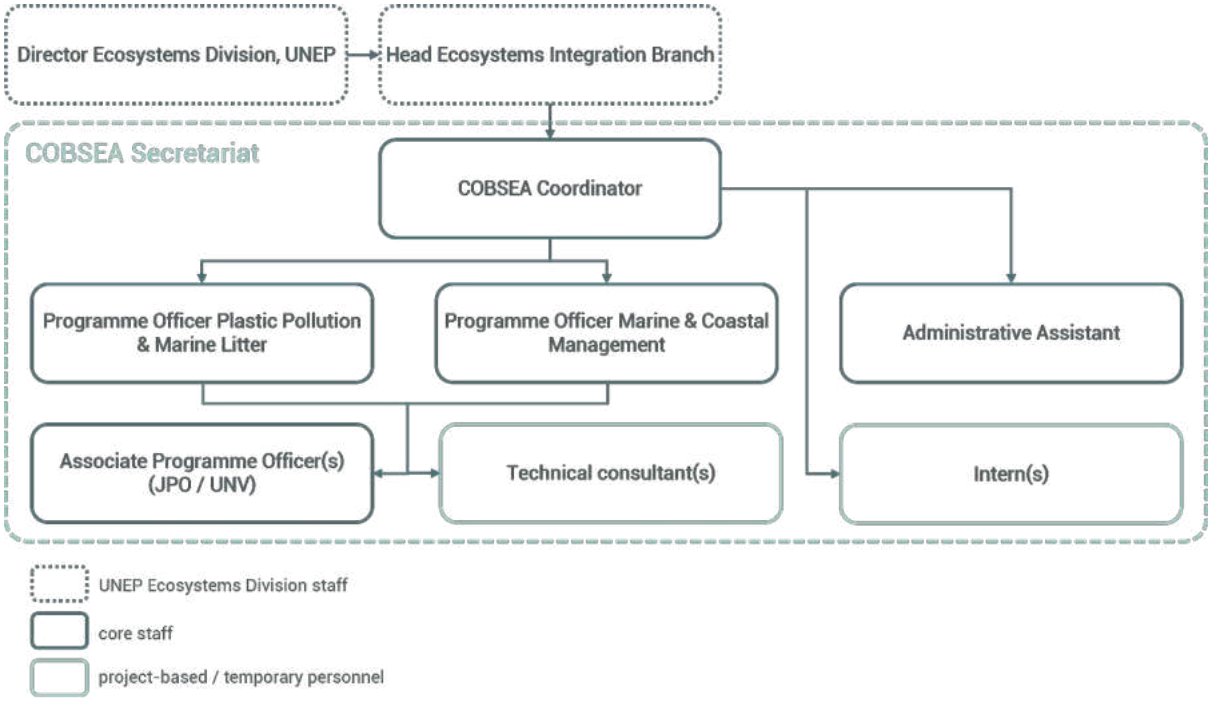


Figure 2: Envisaged COBSEA Secretariat structure in 2023-2027

61. To facilitate decision making and provide guidance to the Secretariat during the intersessional period, time-sensitive issues may be agreed upon on an exceptional basis by silence procedure via email correspondence with National Focal Points, following adequate consultation and review of relevant documents that will be provided by the Secretariat at least six weeks prior to decision making. This modality may be used when participating countries align on the urgency of an issue, requiring guidance by IGM in the intersessional period. For instance, there may be compelling opportunities for resource mobilization or unforeseen events. Virtual IGMs and silence procedure may be used, where needed as an exception, in line with decisions by the United Nations General Assembly and UNEA rules and procedures.

62. In line with UNEA resolution 2/10,[32] expansion of COBSEA membership to additional countries in the East Asian Seas region may be considered by IGM to address transboundary issues identified in thematic programmes. Participating countries may agree to invite countries who have expressed interest to join the IGM as observers. Any consideration of membership to COBSEA and relevant terms shall be decided by IGM by consensus.

63. Participating countries may request the Secretariat to develop relevant documentation to prepare the review and update of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, as needed, for consideration by IGM.

[32] UNEA resolution 2/10 invites "member States that have not done so to consider becoming parties to and/or members of regional seas conventions and action plans."

64. In line with UNEA resolution 2/10 on Oceans and Seas, COBSEA has a mandate to implement activities that support the regional delivery of ocean-related SDGs and to support countries to track and report progress towards the achievement of their targets. A regional SDG Implementation Outlook report was shared with participating countries to guide this effort. COBSEA will continue to work with participating countries, the Regional Seas Programme, and relevant partners to support follow-up and review of progress towards the ocean-related SDGs within the scope of COBSEA's mandate.

6.2 Institutional Structure and Regional Mechanisms

65. The COBSEA institutional structure comprises the IGM of participating countries, supported by Working Groups on Marine Litter (WGML) and Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE), to support the implementation of regional frameworks (see Figure 3). Working Groups are established by IGM to provide guidance to the COBSEA Secretariat, which is responsible for coordinating implementation of COBSEA frameworks and activities, managing projects, and mobilizing resources for initiatives.

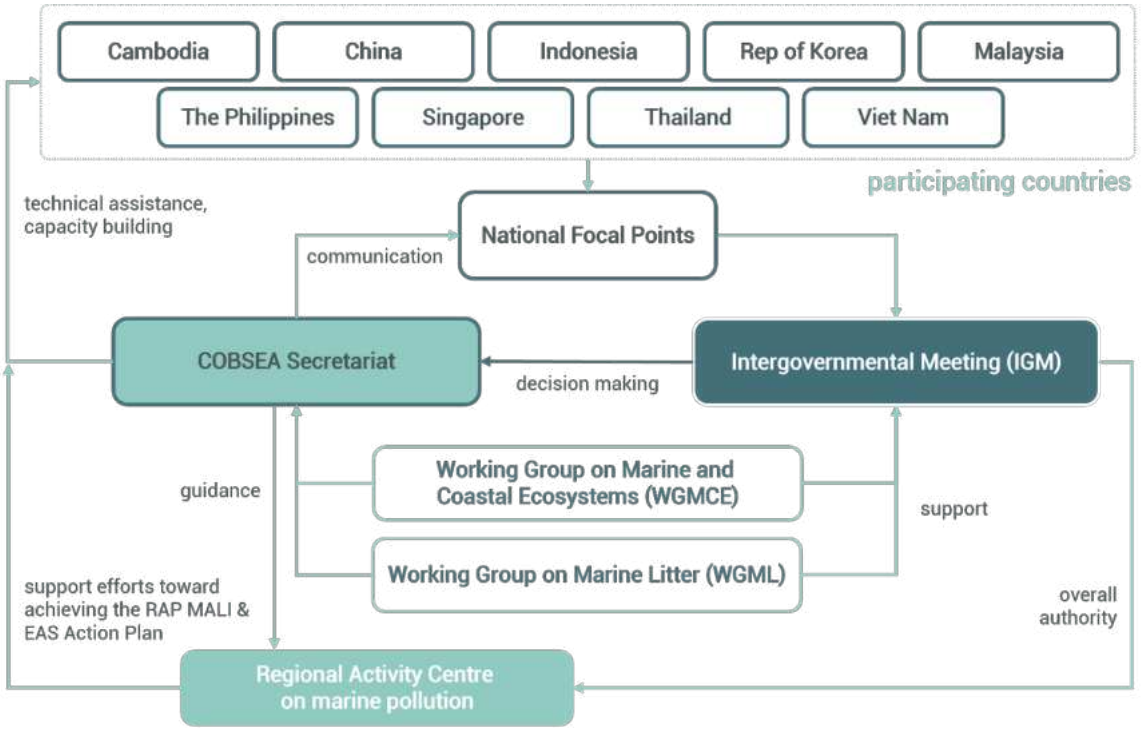


Figure 3: COBSEA institutional structure in 2023

66. The COBSEA institutional structure and capacity for implementation can be strengthened further through the establishment of Regional Activity Centres (RACs). RACs are financially autonomous international or regional organizations that have been designated by the IGM to carry out specific technical functions and activities. They strengthen delivery of activities through the decentralization of work and additional human and financial resources. A participating country may propose the establishment of a RAC, in consultation with the Secretariat, for consideration by the IGM, in line with Guidance on the Establishment and Operation of COBSEA Regional Activity Centres (UNEP/COBSEA IGM 24/7).

67. The resumed session of IGM 25 established the Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) in Bali as the first RAC on marine pollution. The MCE Framework proposes that a RAC for Marine and Coastal Ecosystems would benefit COBSEA through activities such as implementing blue economy approaches; monitoring and assessment; communications and advocacy; and science, innovation, and policy.

6.3 Financial Sustainability and Resource Mobilization

68. To address the sustainability and stability of the Secretariat over the next five years, adequate and reliable financing is required for core staff to implement the programme of work and ensure effective operation of COBSEA. Staffing levels are determined based on the context and needs of COBSEA and may draw from experience of other RSCAPs. To enable operation of COBSEA, core staff may include: the position of Coordinator at the staffing level appropriate for responsibilities; professional staff positions to coordinate implementation of each thematic programme at a staffing level that allows for supervision of additional project personnel; and a team assistant to support administrative processes. Additional positions at Associate Programme Officer level may support the Secretariat and project implementation, subject to extrabudgetary funds, including UNVs and JPOs. To supplement human resource capacity, participating countries are encouraged to consider the secondment of staff from participating country institutions or sponsoring JPOs.

69. The Secretariat will conduct a cost-benefit analysis of its operations that addresses the sustainability and stability of the staff structure; outlines in a clear and transparent manner how Trust Fund contributions are utilized; explores different funding modalities; and assesses what additional mid- to long-term benefits would accrue from additional contributions to strengthen the Secretariat.[33]

70. The Secretariat will prepare biennial workplans and budgets for implementation of the Strategic Directions for consideration by the IGM. Trust Fund budgets will focus on core operations and cross-cutting activities, including staffing of the Secretariat; organization of the IGM and preparation of documentation for consideration; communication and regional coordination; and activities related to monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Directions. Where relevant under complementary regional frameworks such as the RAP MALI and the MCE Framework, comprehensive workplans and budgets will be developed by respective Working Groups, including use of extrabudgetary funding to complement Trust Fund budgets.

71. In addition to the annual country contributions to the Trust Fund to provide core funding for COBSEA's operational costs, the Secretariat is responsible for mobilizing extrabudgetary resources to fund project activities.

72. The programme of activities envisaged by these Strategic Directions will require further mobilization of resources from multilateral and bilateral agencies. To this end, a donor mapping exercise will be undertaken as an early priority in the five-year period, undertaken by the Secretariat with support from the member countries. This will identify multilateral and bilateral donors that align with COBSEA's vision and have interests that map on to one or more of its thematic programmes.

[33] Evaluation of Strategic Directions 2018-2022 and Guidance for development of new Strategic Directions 2023-2027. UNEP/COBSEA IGM 25/16, 2022.

6.4 Partnership Development

73. There are many regional organizations in the East Asian Seas region with similar objectives and in some cases overlapping mandates. At the UN level, the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) operates in the neighbouring northwest Pacific region and includes the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea as members. Membership of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Sub-Commission of the Western Pacific (IOC-WESTPAC) includes all COBSEA members except Cambodia. ASEAN membership includes all seven South-East Asian COBSEA countries with the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea included in ASEAN+3 for economic cooperation. Other active regional organizations with overlapping mandates and membership include Partnerships in Environmental Management of the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action (ATSEA), Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF) and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC).

74. COBSEA's comparative advantage is that as a Regional Seas programme administered by UNEP, it can translate global issues reflected in UNEA resolutions, UNEP's MTS and the Regional Seas Strategic Directions into the regional East Asian Seas context. COBSEA is implementing body for the EAS Action Plan with a mandate to coordinate coastal and marine initiatives in the region and facilitate policy development.

75. COBSEA will formulate a partnership development strategy that seeks to explore synergies and strengthen longer term engagement with key regional partners with complementary mandates and programmatic agendas. This will start with the UN system partners in the region and ASEAN through the UN-ASEAN cooperation agreement. Discussions with other regional organizations, particularly PEMSEA, will follow with the objective of identifying opportunities for collaboration. Follow-up to the ongoing GEF project – Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS-SAP) through an updated Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Programme with a clear role for COBSEA will be another useful opportunity for partnerships and sustainability.

76. COBSEA will explore opportunities to engage philanthropy organizations and the private sector as potential partners and sources of investment in COBSEA projects, in accordance with UNEP's strategy and policy for private sector engagement.

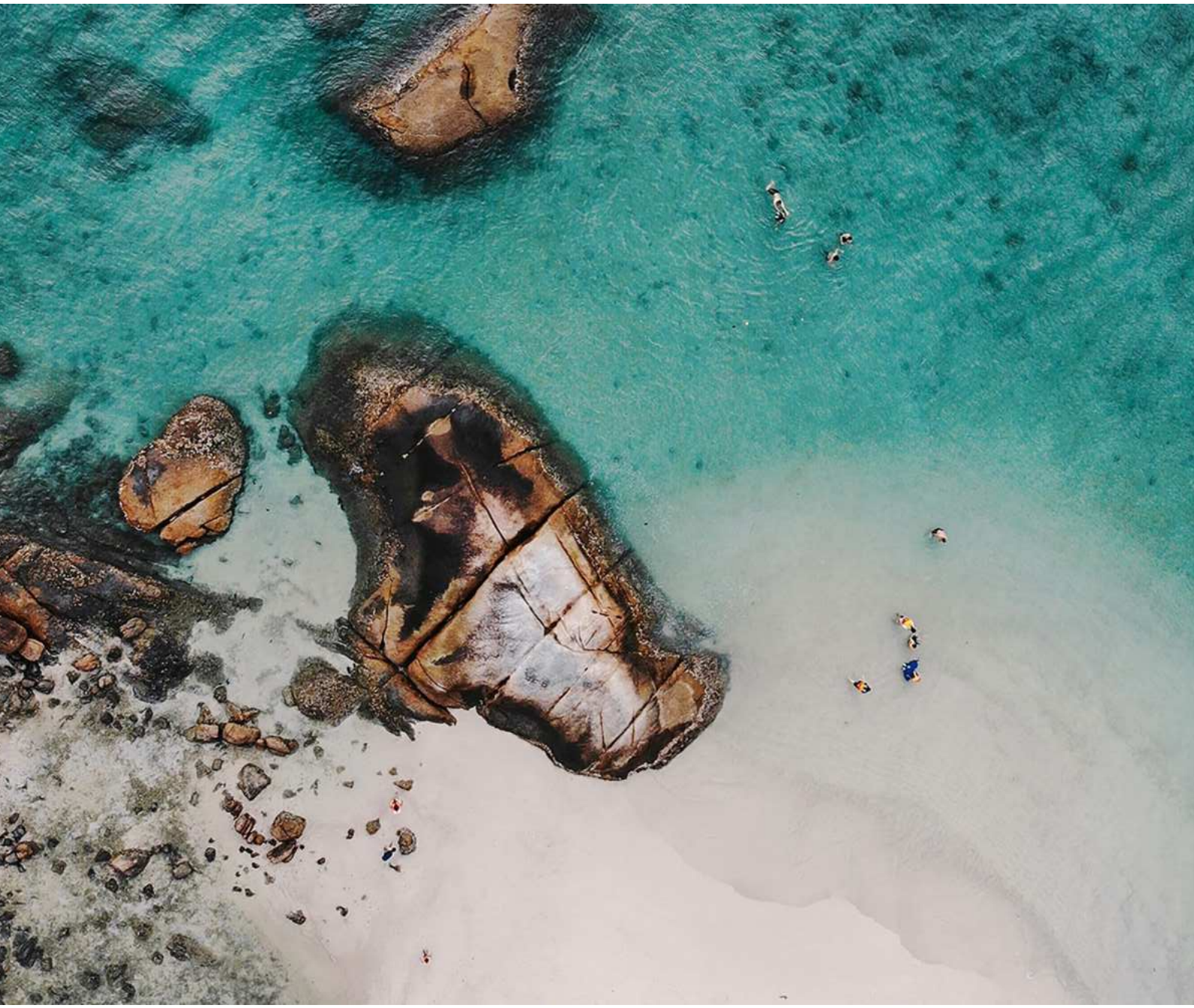
6.5 Monitoring and Evaluation of the Strategic Directions

77. The Secretariat is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Strategic Directions under the guidance of participating countries through the IGM. The Secretariat will conduct assessments of progress achieved, including a Mid-Term Review of the Strategic Directions, and will report findings and provide recommendations for any adjustments to the IGM.

78. A Terminal Evaluation will be externally commissioned through an open and fair selection process in the last year of implementation (2027), with adequate funding identified in the Trust Fund budget. It will be conducted in accordance with UNEP's Evaluation Policy,[34] and in close consultation with participating countries and the Secretariat.

[34] UNEP Evaluation Office (2022). UNEP Evaluation Policy (Revised October 2022). https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/41114. Accessed 15 December 2023.

ANNEX



Alignment with relevant global frameworks[35]

Primary SDG Targets	Kunming-Montreal GBF Targets	UNEA Resolutions	UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Outcomes	Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Targets
Marine Pollution Prevention, Reduction and Control				
14.1 - By 2025, prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds, in particular from land-based activities, including marine debris and nutrient pollution. **6.3** - By 2030, improve water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse globally. **11.6** - By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.	**Target 7** - Reduce pollution risks and the negative impact of pollution from all sources, by 2030, to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, considering cumulative effects, including: reducing excess nutrients lost to the environment by at least half including through more efficient nutrient cycling and use; reducing the overall risk from pesticides and highly hazardous chemicals by at least half including through integrated pest management, based on science, taking into account food security and livelihoods; and also preventing, reducing, and working towards eliminating plastic pollution.	**EA.1/6 –** Marine plastic debris and microplastics. **EA.2/8** – Sustainable consumption and production. **EA.2/11** – Marine plastic litter and microplastics. **EA.3/7** – Marine litter and microplastics. **EA.3/10** – Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems. **EA.4/1** – Innovative pathways to achieve sustainable consumption and production. **EA.4/6** – Marine plastic litter and microplastics.	**Chemicals and Pollution Action** **Outcome 1:** Human health and environmental outcomes are optimized through enhanced capacity and leadership in the sound management of chemicals and waste. **Outcome 2**: Waste management is improved, including through circular processes, safe recovery of secondary raw materials and progressive reduction of open burning and dump sites. **Outcome 3**: Releases of pollutants to air, water,	**1.6 -** Pollution affecting marine and coastal areas prevented towards the achievement of the Beyond-2020 Framework for sound management of chemicals and waste: • Synergies with the work of ocean-related measures of chemicals and waste MEAs contributed to and maximized. • Conventions and Protocols effectively implemented within the mandate of RSCAPs and, where relevant to regional issues and priorities, for both land- and sea-based sources of marine pollution. **1.5** – Sustainable consumption and production patterns promoted as a means to achieve a circular economy and towards expediting

[35] This overview is not exhaustive and other new/existing frameworks may be considered as relevant, such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

Primary SDG Targets	Kunming-Montreal GBF Targets	UNEA Resolutions	UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Outcomes	Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Targets
12.4 - By 2020, achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, in accordance with agreed international frameworks, and significantly reduce their release to air, water and soil in order to minimize their adverse impacts on human health and the environment. **12.5** - By 2030, substantially reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse.	**Target 16** - Ensure that people are encouraged and enabled to make sustainable consumption choices including by establishing supportive policy, legislative or regulatory frameworks, improving education and access to relevant and accurate information and alternatives, and by 2030, reduce the global footprint of consumption in an equitable manner, including through halving global food waste, significantly reducing overconsumption and substantially reducing waste generation, in order for all people to live well in harmony with Mother Earth.	**EA.4/11** – Protection of the marine environment from land-based activities. **EA.4/14** – Sustainable nitrogen management. **EA.5/2** – Sustainable nitrogen management. **EA.5/11** – Enhancing circular economy as a contribution to achieving sustainable consumption and production. **EA.5/14** – End plastic pollution: towards an international legally binding instrument.	soil and the ocean are reduced.	achievement of relevant international agreements and SDG13 targets where unsustainable patterns relate to impacts on ocean health and adaptation (acidification, coral reef management, coastal resilience), and where these reduce effectiveness of ecosystem-based mitigation (blue carbon, tipping points, ecosystem valuation). • Nutrient run-off prevented. • Wastewater management enhanced. • Marine plastic pollution reduced.
Marine and Coastal Biodiversity, Ecosystems Conservation and Management				
14.2 - By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration to achieve healthy and productive oceans.	**Target 1** - Ensure that all areas are under participatory integrated biodiversity inclusive spatial planning and/or effective management processes addressing land and sea use change, to bring the loss of areas of high biodiversity importance, including ecosystems of high	**EA.2/10** – Oceans and seas. **EA.2/12** – Sustainable coral reefs management. **EA.2/16** – Mainstreaming biodiversity for well-being.	**Nature Action** **Outcome 1**: An economically and socially sustainable pathway for halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem integrity is established.	**1.3** - Marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) promoted towards the Post-2020 GBF targets. • Marine protected areas designated, effectively managed and ecological connectivity strengthened.

Primary SDG Targets	Kunming-Montreal GBF Targets	UNEA Resolutions	UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Outcomes	Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Targets
14.5 - By 2020, conserve at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information 12.2. **6.6** - By 2020, protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers, and lakes.	ecological integrity, close to zero by 2030, while respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities. **Target 2** - Ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine ecosystems are under effective restoration, in order to enhance biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, ecological integrity and connectivity. **Target 3** - Ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water and coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and	**EA.4/12** – Sustainable management for global health of mangrove. **EA.4/13** – Sustainable coral reefs management. **EA.5/5** – Nature-based solutions for supporting sustainable development. **EA.5/6** – Biodiversity and health.	**Outcome 2**: Sustainable management of nature is adopted and implemented in development frameworks. **Outcome 3**: Nature conservation and restoration are enhanced.	• Sea areas under spatial planning increased. • Degraded marine ecosystems restored. • Cooperation and integration of ICZM and MSP strengthened between different RSCAPs and various sectoral organizations (e.g., fisheries and biodiversity organizations).

Primary SDG Targets	Kunming-Montreal GBF Targets	UNEA Resolutions	UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Outcomes	Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Targets
	traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories. **Target 11** - Restore, maintain and enhance nature's contributions to people, including ecosystem functions and services, such as regulation of air, water, and climate, soil health, pollination and reduction of disease risk, as well as protection from natural hazards and disasters, through nature-based solutions and/or ecosystem-based approaches for the benefit of all people and nature.			

Primary SDG Targets	Kunming-Montreal GBF Targets	UNEA Resolutions	UNEP MTS 2022-2025 Outcomes	Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2022-2025 Targets
Climate Action				
13.1 - Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries. **13.2** - Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning. **13.3** - Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning. **11.B** - 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels.	**Target 8 -** Minimize the impact of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity and increase its resilience through mitigation, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction actions, including through nature-based solution and/or ecosystem-based approaches, while minimizing negative and fostering positive impacts of climate action on biodiversity.	**EA.1/8** – Ecosystem-based Adaptation. **EA.2/6** – Supporting the Paris Agreement	**Climate Action** **Outcome 1:** Decision makers at all levels adopt decarbonization, dematerialization and resilience pathways. **Outcome 2**: Countries and stakeholders have increased capacity, finance and access to technologies to deliver on adaptation and mitigation goals. **Outcome 3**: State and non-state actors adopt the enhanced transparency framework arrangements under the Paris Agreement.	**1.1** - Resilience increased through Nature-based Solutions. • Protection, sustainable management and restoration of marine and coastal carbon sinks and other critical ecosystems supported, including mangroves, corals, seagrasses and salt marshes. • Ecosystem-based adaptation promoted to enhance adaptive capacity and resilience, as well as reduced vulnerability to climate change.

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