

First Informal Consultations Developing a Strategic Framework for COBSEA's Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

Meeting Summary

Date: 04 August 2022, Thursday

Time: 13:00 – 14:30 (UTC +7)

Welcome Remarks

1. The Coordinator for the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, opened the first informal consultations in developing a strategic framework for the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems of the East Asian Seas (EAS). Mr. Pradhan welcomed participants from all the 9 COBSEA participating countries as well as colleagues from UN Environment Programme (UNEP) – World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC) at Cambridge.
2. Mr. Pradhan highlighted recent global and regional efforts including relevant United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolutions, the UNEP Medium-Term Strategy, the Regional Seas Strategic Directions, the UN World Ocean Conference, the ongoing UN Decade for the Ecosystems Restoration, as well as negotiations for the Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. These provide a useful context and rationale for consolidating COBSEA's efforts on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and the development of a new framework. This framework in turn will be useful in the formulation of COBSEA's new Strategic Directions 2023-2027.

Introduction and Background

3. COBSEA UNV, Ms. Margarita Victoria Caballa, explained the background of the draft Marine and Coastal Ecosystems framework. Ms. Caballa mentioned that the design of the framework is based on previous COBSEA efforts on marine and coastal planning and management, desk reviews conducted by COBSEA, and the different international and regional targets and strategies.
4. Previous COBSEA Marine and Coastal Planning and Management initiatives focused on coral reefs and marine and coastal spatial planning (MCSP). Coral Reef activities included the Green Fins project, which was initiated in COBSEA countries, and now implemented internationally. The Swedish-funded MCSP project led to the development of national guidelines on spatial planning as well as a core set of MCSP trainers in 6 COBSEA countries. COBSEA also recently drafted two related desk studies: the MCSP Policy Review on the East Asian Seas and the MPA Situational Analysis of the East Asian Seas. The recommendations from the evaluation reports of previous projects including the recommendations from these desk studies were considered in the design of the framework.
5. UNEP-WCMC Lead Marine Scientist, Dr. Chris McOwen, further discussed UNEP-WCMC's efforts in the region. Their ocean-related work is broken down into three pillars: risks, vulnerability, and solutions. A notable example in the East Asian Seas is the mangrove restoration programme in Myanmar that ensures an integrated approach. Dr. McOwen reiterates that actions must be supported by scientific knowledge and participatory engagement with stakeholders. Finally, UNEP-WCMC also implements the National Ecosystem Initiative in Viet Nam, Cambodia, and

Thailand which provides relevant information on the ecosystems that will help decision makers in governance and policy development.

6. Looking forward, Dr. McOwen mentioned that there are a lot of exciting opportunities and interests on the marine and coastal ecosystems topic as evidenced by the UN Oceans Conference, UNEA, and the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.
7. To complement, Mr. Pradhan highlighted several regional frameworks and targets, including the Regional Seas Strategic Directions and its Core indicators, the East Asian Seas Action Plan, as well as the COBSEA Strategic Directions which is currently being evaluated followed by the formulation of new Strategic Directions.
8. Ms. Tianjiao Liu of COBSEA shared a preliminary analysis of opportunities and partnerships for the proposed Marine and Coastal Ecosystems framework. These included funding opportunities and strategic partnerships, and requested participants to provide additional inputs/opportunities.

Developing a Strategic Framework for COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

9. The COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework seeks to integrate and harmonize efforts related to marine and coastal ecosystems in the East Asian Seas. The framework aims to strengthen conservation and governance, align with international and regional targets, represent all COBSEA participating countries, and provide guidance on activities in the East Asian Seas.
10. The framework identifies four thematic areas, namely: Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP), Marine Protected Areas (MPA), Marine and Coastal Habitats, and Cross-cutting mechanisms.
11. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning refers to the ecosystem-based management approach which analyses and allocates the marine and coastal space according to different priorities and purposes. Project ideas include the development of an MCSP for the EAS Region, development and implementation of national MCSP, and supporting countries in MCSP activities.
12. MPAs refer to delineated marine and coastal areas with conservation as the main priority. A key project idea for MPAs in the EAS is the establishment of a regional MPA Network, whether through ecological connectivity, social, or management-based. It can also be a sub-regional Network, connecting the management process of Large Marine Ecosystems which cuts across several EAS countries. MPA projects can also include the strengthening of governance and capacity of MPA managers and the ecological effectiveness of the MPAs.
13. Marine and Coastal Habitats within the scope of COBSEA are coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetlands. Projects in this area may include restoration and rehabilitation, small-fund grants, capacity building on the code of conduct when interacting with the habitats.
14. Finally, cross-cutting themes that affect the different areas are blue economy, blue carbon and climate change, data management, community of practice and knowledge sharing, and community participation. These cross-cutting themes or areas must be considered when developing and implementing projects across the other teams.
15. The framework presents a preliminary implementation strategy to guide understanding on how each of these areas relate to each other. While the proposed implementation starts with a regional programme on MCSP, the implementation pathway can vary depending on priorities of countries and funding sources.

Proposed Informal Working Group on COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

16. To support the implementation of the framework and ensure engagement of the COBSEA participating countries, the COBSEA Secretariat proposes the establishment of a Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems. The goal of the Working Group is to ensure the sustainability of the marine and coastal ecosystems of the EAS for both people and planet by creating an open working environment towards a harmonized effort, identifying regional and national priorities, provide expert advice on the strategy, and support COBSEA and participating countries in attaining the collective goals.
17. Ms. Caballa presented the objectives, funding options, functions of this proposed Working Group. These are included in the draft Terms of References (ToR), which was distributed to participants.

Open Discussions

18. Mr. Pradhan opened the floor for any comments, insights, and recommendations based on the presentations. Highlights of feedback and guidance from COBSEA participating countries are summarised as follows.
19. Viet Nam: Mr. Luu Anh-Doc expressed a general agreement on the ideas and plans for marine protected areas and the sustainable use of the coastal resources. Viet Nam is working on the System of MPAs that was initiated by the Prime Minister. Viet Nam will mobilize their specialists to join future meetings on marine and coastal ecosystems organized by COBSEA.
20. Indonesia: Mr. Dasrul Chaniago shared appreciation on COBSEA's proposal to establish a Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems. He thanked the COBSEA Secretariat for implementing the Strategic Directions 2018-2022 as closely as possible. He sought clarification on funding for implementation of the proposed framework, and whether these funds were additional to existing contributions to COBSEA Trust Fund. It was clarified that no additional contribution to the COBSEA Trust Fund is required for this Working Group, and resources are expected to be mobilized externally, similar to the Working Group on Marine Litter (RAP MALI).
21. Thailand: Ms. Chanokphon Jantharakhantee expressed agreement on the proposed framework. She mentioned that this was closely aligned with Thailand's current roadmap for the establishment of MPAs. She reported that the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources recently established three new MPAs on 20 July 2022.
22. Singapore: Mr. Collin Tong stated that Singapore will share the proposed framework with relevant colleagues and local stakeholders, and hopes to revert with further feedback, if any.
23. Republic of Korea: Dr. Won-Tae Shin welcomed and supported the proposal to establish a Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and the proposed thematic areas of the proposed framework. Mr. Won-Tae suggested the inclusion of Blue Economy as an overarching thematic area or as a separate thematic area due to its significance with international organizations and prevalence of funding opportunities focused on blue economy.
24. The Philippines: Mr. John Erick Avelino supported the framework and expressed its alignment to the existing activities of the Philippines. He mentioned that COBSEA should ensure that targets do not overlap with other stakeholders in the region. Mr. Avelino reiterated that COBSEA's strength is on ensuring transboundary cooperation among countries through a seascapes approach.

25. Malaysia: Ms. Izarenah binti Md Repin shared the alignment of the framework with existing efforts of Malaysia. She mentioned that Malaysia has several major projects related to MCSP with the national coastal zone planning as developed by the Planning Department, which incorporates a seascapes approach.
26. China: Mr. Yunjun Yu agreed on the establishment of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Working Group. The proposed framework is in line with China's initiative to protect and improve the beauty of their coasts. The past decades have seen remarkable progress on MPAs and MCSP in the China with a strong support, while avoiding the development of "paper parks". Different Ministries are responsible for different thematic areas listed in the proposed Framework, which will require further coordination.
27. Cambodia: Mr. Than Monomoyith mentioned that Cambodia has only one marine national park but aims to upgrade and/or develop further marine national parks. Cambodia has several partners working in this area, such as IUCN and FFI, while Cambodia continues to work with COBSEA, Sea Circular, GIZ, and JICA on marine litter activities. Mr. Monomoyith expressed support for the COBSEA proposal.
28. Dr McOwen of UNEP-WCMC expressed his excitement on the upcoming activities and its alignment with opportunities along the way. UNEP-WCMC looks to coordinate with COBSEA and the COBSEA participating countries in the further development and implementation of the proposed framework.
29. Ms. Han Meng of UNEP-WCMC noted the value of putting all the work together and highlighted the importance of incorporating the points raised by the COBSEA participating countries. She highlighted the importance of close coordination amongst relevant stakeholders.

Conclusions and Way Forward

30. These informal consultations are vital in determining the marine and coastal ecosystems work while formulating COBSEA's Strategic Directions and in the COBSEA's 25th Intergovernmental Meeting part 2 (IGM25.2) scheduled on 12-13 October 2022.
31. Based on feedback of COBSEA participating countries, a second consultative meeting will be tentatively scheduled in mid-September to continue these discussions prior to COBSEA IGM25.2. The COBSEA Secretariat will update the draft Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework based on the inputs received from the COBSEA participating countries. Countries are also welcome to provide any further inputs and feedback prior to then.
32. On behalf of the COBSEA Secretariat, Mr. Pradhan expressed his gratitude to all the participants for their valuable inputs and feedback. COBSEA looks forward to the active engagement of the COBSEA participating countries in further developing the marine and coastal ecosystems framework and its implementation.

Action Points

33. Dr. Chris McOwen requests recommendations from COBSEA participating countries on identifying seascapes in the region requiring significant restoration. Seascapes must cross several marine and coastal habitats. UNEP-WCMC is currently conducting research to help with an important call for funding proposals in 2023.

34. COBSEA participating countries are invited to review the draft Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework and provide relevant feedback to the COBSEA Secretariat on the content, thematic areas, and value of the Framework for both regional and national interests. The COBSEA Secretariat welcomes any comments and recommendations. Included in the draft Framework is the establishment of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems and its corresponding ToR.
35. COBSEA participating countries are further invited to provide final review and feedback on the draft Marine Protected Area Situational Analysis.
36. The COBSEA Secretariat requests all countries to provide their feedback on these three items on or before 25 August 2022 to ensure documents are prepared on a timely basis for IGM25 Part 2.

Annex 1: Agenda

First Informal Consultations Developing a Strategic Framework for COBSEA's Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

Date: 4th August 2022, Thursday

Time: 1.5 hours; 13h00 – 14h30 (UTC +7)

Content	Time	Speaker
1. Welcome Remarks and Introductions	10 mins	Mahesh Pradhan COBSEA Coordinator
2. Introduction and Background 2.1. Work in the East Asian Seas - COBSEA Marine & Coastal Planning & Management - WCMC Work in the Region 2.2. Frameworks and Strategies - Global Frameworks and Strategies - Sustainable Development Goals - UNEP Marine and Coastal Strategy - Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework - Regional - Regional Seas Strategic Directions - COBSEA Action Plan and Strategic Directions 2.3 Opportunities and Partners	20 mins	Margarita Caballa COBSEA UNV Chris McOwen UNEP-WCMC Mahesh Pradhan COBSEA Coordinator Tianjiao Liu COBSEA
3. Developing a Strategic Framework for COBSEA's Marine and Coastal Ecosystems	15 mins	Margarita Caballa COBSEA UNV
4. Proposed informal Working Group on COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems	15 mins	Margarita Caballa COBSEA UNV
5. Open Discussions	20 mins	Mahesh Pradhan COBSEA Coordinator
6. Conclusion and Way Forward	10 mins	Mahesh Pradhan COBSEA Coordinator

Annex 2: List of Participants

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Attachments

1. Draft Framework on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (inc. Terms of Reference for Working Group)
2. Powerpoint presentation on First Consultations
3. Draft MPA Situational Analysis for final review and comments