



COBSEA

COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA

Strategic Directions

2018-2022

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Preface

- i. The East Asian Seas Action Plan defines the specific functions of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), which include regular examination, evaluation and revision of its strategy (paragraph 34.1).
- ii. In Resolution 1 adopted at the 22nd Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) of COBSEA, held from 27 to 28 April 2015 in Bangkok, Thailand, COBSEA participating countries agreed to entrust a consultant recruited by United Nations Environment Programme (UN Environment) to identify the current priorities and strategic directions for COBSEA. Draft Strategic Directions were prepared based on consultations with all COBSEA Focal Points, national experts, UN Environment staff, representatives from regional projects and programmes, and donors. Supporting information was also gleaned from COBSEA IGM reports, the independent review of the East Asian Seas Action Plan carried out in 2004; reports and evaluations of COBSEA-implemented projects from the past ten years; as well as strategies of UN Environment-administered Regional Seas Programmes, Regional Seas Strategic Directions 2017-2020, relevant UN Environment Assembly Resolutions, and relevant UN Environment strategic documents including the Programme of Work 2014-2017 and 2018-2021.
- iii. The Draft Strategic Directions were presented to the 23rd COBSEA IGM, held in Bangkok, Thailand, 27-28 February 2017. In Resolution 1 adopted at the meeting, COBSEA participating countries requested the COBSEA Secretariat to further develop the Strategic Directions based on comments from Participating Countries, current regional priorities and priorities expressed in the 2030 Development Agenda; and agreed to undertake national consultations on the revised draft and to submit comments in writing to the COBSEA Secretariat, based on which Strategic Directions would be finalized and adopted through an Extraordinary Intergovernmental Meeting to be held in 2017. A revised draft of the COBSEA Strategic Directions was prepared by the COBSEA Secretariat for national consultation and review, and a workshop was convened in Bangkok, Thailand, 9 September 2017, towards finalization of the COBSEA Strategic Directions.
- iv. This document contains the final COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022, as adopted by the Second Extraordinary Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA, held in Bangkok, Thailand, 25-26 April 2018.



1

INTRODUCTION

1. The Regional Seas Programme was launched by UN Environment in 1974. Today more than 143 countries have joined 18 Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans for the sustainable management and use of the marine and coastal environment.
2. Individual Regional Seas programmes reflect a similar approach, tailored to address regional context and environmental challenges. Action plans adopted by participating governments establish a framework for protecting the environment and promote sustainable development. In most cases, Action Plans are underpinned by a regional Convention and associated Protocols. Several Regional Seas have established Regional Activity Centres which carry out activities related to the Action Plan, guided by Regional Seas governing bodies and secretariats.
3. 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) was adopted in April 1981, by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. An Intergovernmental Meeting in December 1981 determined the institutional and financial arrangements for the implementation of the Action Plan. This established the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA). At the request of participating governments, the Executive Director of UN Environment established the Regional Coordinating Unit for the East Asian Seas Action Plan (EAS/RCU) in 1993, functioning as a Secretariat for COBSEA. The East Asian Seas Action Plan was revised in 1994, with five additional countries joining COBSEA: Australia¹, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea and Vietnam.
4. The principal objective of the East Asian Seas Action Plan is the development and protection of the marine environment and coastal areas, for the protection of the health and wellbeing of present and future generations. Specifically, the Action Plan is aimed at assessment of the state of the marine environment including effects of marine and land-based activities on environmental quality; and development of coordinating measures for successful implementation of the action plan.
5. Implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan is guided by strategies adopted by the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting². The COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022 were developed in response to Resolution 1 adopted at 22nd COBSEA IGM and as further directed in Resolution 1 adopted at 23rd COBSEA IGM, based on consultation with Participating Countries and addressing current regional priorities and priorities expressed in the 2030 Development Agenda.

¹ Australia withdrew from COBSEA in 2011

² Past strategies in the context of the East Asian Seas Action Plan include "Long term strategies (1987-96) for the East Asian Seas Action Plan"; "Long-term strategy (1994-2009) of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia"; "Vision and Plan – A Systematic Approach" adopted in 1999; and "New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)"



1.1 Environmental Status and Trends

6. East Asian Seas hold incomparable marine biodiversity, including the world's largest expanses of coral reef, mangrove and seagrass, underpinning high productivity. However, rapid change over the past decades, including demographic change, social and economic development, and altered lifestyles, have had significant implications for marine environmental health³.

7. Hundreds of millions of people in the region rely on seafood for much of their protein intake, and many nations are major seafood exporters. This drives over fishing, in some instances destructive fishing, and expansion of coastal aquaculture. Agriculture, logging and other land use contribute to siltation and delivery of nutrients, herbicides and pesticides to the marine environment. Disposal of untreated or partially treated wastewater, including domestic, industrial and agricultural wastewater, are significant sources of coastal pollution. With changing economies and lifestyles, marine litter has emerged as a major challenge, and the region may generate as much as half the world's marine plastic litter⁴. Pollution from maritime transport may have locally severe impacts. There is also significant alteration of the shoreline and coastal environment through reclamation as well as shoreline armouring to address coastal vulnerability to erosion.

³ UNEP 2016. GEO-6 Regional Assessment for Asia and the Pacific. United Nations Environment Programme, Nairobi, Kenya.

⁴ J. R. Jambeck et al. 2015 "Plastic waste inputs from land into the ocean," Science, Vol.347, No. 6223; and Ocean Conservancy 2016: 'Stemming the Tide: Land-based Strategies for a plastic-free ocean'.

8. These pressures on the marine environment have led to widespread habitat degradation. Over half of the original mangrove cover has been lost, and the annual rate of loss remains high in many countries⁵. Human activities directly threaten 95% of the region's coral reefs, with half of reefs under "high" or "very high" threat⁶. Data on seagrass and wetland loss are limited, but is estimated to be comparable to that of mangroves and coral reefs. This ecosystem degradation results in loss of biodiversity as well as ecosystem services and associated economic values that underpin fisheries, tourism and shoreline protection.

9. Climate change and ocean acidification increasingly add to direct anthropogenic pressures on marine and coastal ecosystems. Among the most visible and destructive impacts of sea surface temperature increase is coral bleaching, which is projected to become more frequent and severe. Increasing sea water temperature also leads to enhanced stratification and decreased oxygen concentrations. Ocean acidification impacts in coastal areas are likely to be aggravated by nutrient pollution. Loss of mangroves, seagrass beds and coastal wetlands reduces carbon sequestration and releases carbon to the atmosphere from sediment and biomass reservoirs. Coastal erosion and vulnerability to natural hazards, already significant challenges in many parts of the region due to poorly planned land use and degradation of coastal ecosystems, will become more severe with sea level rise and changed weather patterns.

10. While demographic and development pressures are major drivers of marine and coastal degradation in the region, adverse environmental consequences stem in part from poorly conceived planning of coastal and marine areas and challenges associated with national and regional policy and governance frameworks. Environmental management and economic development are characterized by sectoral approaches, insufficient planning for development of coastal and marine space as well as land, and often ineffective use of environmental economic data, such as coastal and marine ecosystem service values, in decision-making. Regional environmental data management and sharing remains limited.

⁵ Spalding et al 2010: World atlas of mangroves. ISBN 978-1-84407-657-4

⁶ WRI 2011: Reefs at Risk Revisited, ISBN 978-1-56973-762-0

1.2 The Role of COBSEA

11. A range of UN agencies, regional organizations, initiatives and partnerships address marine environmental degradation and development in the East Asian Seas region or among countries participating in the East Asian Seas Action Plan (see Annex A).

12. COBSEA is a regional intergovernmental policy forum, recognized as the sole decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan (paragraph 52 of the Action Plan). The COBSEA Secretariat provides overall technical coordination and supervision of the implementation of the action plan (paragraph 55). National Focal Points in each participating country act as a channel of communication, to coordinate participation of and guide national institutions in implementation of COBSEA-approved programmes (paragraph 59). National institutions provide the institutional basis for carrying out the projects under the action plan (paragraph 60).

13. COBSEA activities towards implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan under the "New Strategic Direction for COBSEA (2008-2012)" have focused on Information Management; National Capacity Building; Strategic and Emerging Issues; and Regional Cooperation, emphasizing, in particular, land-based sources of marine pollution, sustainable management of critical habitat, related spatial planning including to build climate change resilience, as well as assessment and knowledge management. Notable achievements include development of a State of the Marine Environment Report, adoption of a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, implementation of a regional project on coastal and marine spatial planning, development of two UN Environment GEF projects for implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea, and implementation of sub-regional projects addressing coastal erosion, environmental sustainability in the dive tourism industry, and participation in natural resource governance on small islands. Annex B provides brief information on ongoing and emerging efforts through COBSEA and UN Environment directly contributing to implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan.

14. COBSEA provides an intergovernmental mechanism for science-based policy setting at the regional level. Decisions of recent Intergovernmental Meetings of COBSEA have ensured a foundation for a sustainable COBSEA Secretariat, funded through the East Asian Seas Trust Fund, hosted by Thailand, and administered by UN Environment. However, the East Asian Seas Action Plan has not been revised since 1994, and thus does not consider recent global policy development, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and relevant UN Environment Assembly Resolutions, and may not fully reflect the marine environmental needs of the region.

1.3 The 2030 Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals

15. Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷ establishes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to balance the three dimensions of sustainable development. While the agenda is integrated, indivisible and universally applicable, SDG 14 “Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development” is particularly and directly relevant to the East Asian Seas Action Plan and the work of COBSEA (see Annex C).

16. Governments have the primary responsibility for follow-up and review of progress made in implementing the SDGs and targets, at national, regional and global levels (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 47). Follow-up and review at the regional level can, as appropriate, provide useful opportunities for peer learning, including through voluntary reviews, sharing of best practices, discussion on shared targets. Inclusive regional processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level. The cooperation of regional organizations is welcomed in this respect (paragraph 80). Bearing in mind the importance of building on existing follow-up and review mechanisms at the regional level, Member States are encouraged to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage, and United Nations regional commissions are encouraged to continue supporting Member States in this regard (paragraph 81).

17. The Call for Action adopted at the 2017 Ocean Conference⁸ provides further and more specific direction in pursuing implementation of SDG 14, including in paragraph 13 which calls on all stakeholders to take actions on an urgent basis, including: Strengthening cooperation, policy coherence and coordination at all levels; Strengthening and promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships, including public-private partnerships; Accelerating actions to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution, particularly from land-based activities, including marine debris, plastics and microplastics, untreated wastewater, solid waste discharges, hazardous substances, pollution from ships and abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear; Promoting waste prevention and minimization and development of sustainable consumption and production patterns; Implementing long-term and robust strategies to reduce the use of plastics and microplastics; Supporting the use of effective and appropriate area-based management tools, including marine protected areas (MPAs) and other integrated, cross-sectoral approaches, including marine spatial planning (MSP) and integrated coastal zone management (ICZM); Supporting resilience to ocean and coastal acidification, sea-level rise, and increase in ocean temperatures, and addressing impacts of climate change on coastal and blue carbon ecosystems and coral reefs; Supporting the promotion and strengthening of sustainable ocean-based economies; and Increasing efforts to mobilise the means necessary for the development of sustainable ocean-related activities and the implementation of Goal 14.

⁷ United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, 25 September 2015, UN General Assembly resolution 70/1

⁸ United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14; New York 5-9 June 2017; UN General Assembly resolution 70/226



2

STRATEGIC DIRECTION

18. The purpose of the COBSEA Strategic Directions 2018-2022 is to guide COBSEA participating countries and the COBSEA Secretariat in action towards development and protection of the marine environment and coastal areas of East Asian Seas, leveraging COBSEA as an intergovernmental policy mechanism towards planning, implementation and tracking of delivery of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the global “Regional Seas Directions 2017-2020”⁹.

19. To this end the Strategic Directions encompass two substantive themes: Land-based marine pollution; and Marine and coastal planning and management; as well as an over-arching Governance theme. The substantive themes identify priority issues relevant to the region's marine and coastal environment and sustainable development, where COBSEA has a particular mandate or comparative advantage to catalyse and deliver policy development, projects and other activities. The governance theme addresses COBSEA as a regional policy mechanism and identifies priorities in creating the necessary conditions for COBSEA and its Secretariat to efficiently deliver their mandates.

⁹ Adopted at the 17th Global Meeting of the Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans, October 2015, encompassing four themes: i) Reduce marine pollution; ii) Increase resilience, health and productivity; iii) Develop integrated, ecosystem-based regional ocean policies and strategies, paying close attention to blue growth; and iv) Enhance effectiveness of Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans as regional platforms for supporting integrated ocean policies and management.



2.1 Land-based Marine Pollution

20. The East Asian Seas Action Plan identifies 'Scientific activities leading towards management', including quality assurance for pollution monitoring, effects of pollution and pollution prevention. Marine pollution is a transboundary issue, requiring regional approaches in diagnosing as well as designing and prioritizing coherent, effective policy and management responses.

21. The Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) is a key mechanism for action to achieve SDG target 14.1, to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds and in particular from land-based activities. Three priority source categories of land-based marine pollution were identified in the 2012 Manila Declaration: nutrients, marine litter and waste water.

22. These global priorities are reflected at the regional level, with deterioration of coastal water quality and the coastal environment as a result of land-based pollution a central concern for COBSEA participating countries. COBSEA adopted a Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter in 2008, and participating countries are already initiating national level efforts to address marine litter providing a foundation for further action. Relevant UNEA Resolutions also provide guidance for additional actions.

23. In addressing land-based pollution, COBSEA will focus on a) Nutrients, sediments and wastewater; as well as b) Marine litter and microplastics, as follows:

a) Nutrients, sediments and wastewater

<i>Purpose</i>	Prevent and reduce eutrophication and sedimentation and their impact on the marine and coastal environment
<i>Measures</i>	Identification of sources of nutrients, sediments and wastewater (such as from agriculture, aquaculture, municipalities); and Prevention, reduction and control through appropriate measures.
<i>Activities</i>	i. Development of regional guideline for identifying and addressing sources of nutrients, sediments and wastewater; ii. Policy and information exchange, including sharing of outputs, results and best practice from projects addressing land-based sources of pollution, including activities towards implementation of the Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the South China Sea; iii. Technical training and capacity building.

b) Marine litter and microplastics

<i>Purpose</i>	Prevent and reduce marine litter and microplastics in the marine and coastal environment
<i>Measures</i>	COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter
<i>Activities</i>	i. Review and revision of the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter adopted in 2008, including alignment with the 2030 Agenda and relevant UNEA Resolutions; ii. Implementation of the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter through development of a regional initiative/project.

24. Opportunities for use of public-private partnership approaches and catalysing investment in implementation addressing land-based pollution will be identified. This may include e.g. pollution reduction through infrastructure development, waste management or land-use management. This approach is in line with the Regional Seas Strategic Directions (2017-2020), and can where relevant draw on global partnerships established in the context of the GPA. Enhanced collaboration and synergies will be sought with the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP). Collaboration with the private sector will also be strengthened in relation to sharing of information and best practices and transfer of technology. Other forms of marine litter, such as abandoned, lost or otherwise discarded fishing gear, requires coordination with competent agencies in the UN system, such as FAO, and relevant regional organizations.



2.2 Marine and Coastal Planning and Management

25. The East Asian Seas Action Plan envisages implementation of integrated marine and coastal management, including the establishment of a viable network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), in order to conserve biodiversity and maintain productivity. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) provides a means to achieve integration across economic sectors and ecosystems, and enable embedding of MPAs and MPA networks within broader development plans. This embodies an ecosystem-based approach based on the best available scientific evidence. It is also noted that the plan will adhere to the provisions of international law such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

26. Balancing use of marine space and resources and biodiversity protection directly supports delivery on SDG target 14.2, to sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts and strengthen resilience; SDG target 14.5 to conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas; and can also contribute to increasing the economic benefits from the sustainable use of marine resources in line with SDG target 14.7, and reducing climate change vulnerability in coastal areas, including supporting ecosystem-based adaptation and mitigation in line with SDG targets 13.1 and 13.2.

27. COBSEA has contributed to the resource base for ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management. This includes technical tools as well as a network of national institutions and resource persons, such as the working groups on coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, coastal wetlands and fishery refugia established in the context of developing and implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea.

However, national legal and policy frameworks often do not sufficiently enable or encourage integration of coastal and marine spatial planning and management across sectors, relevant ministries and agencies. While significant progress has been made in the region in terms of establishment of Marine Protected Areas, there are still gaps in relation to, for example, Marine Protected Area coverage, networking, and integration of Marine Protected Areas within broader spatial planning efforts.

27. In addressing marine and coastal planning and management, COBSEA will strengthen use of ecosystem-based management approaches based on the best available scientific evidence, including MPAs and MSP, towards achievement of relevant SDGs and Aichi Targets, as follows:

<i>Purpose</i>	To enhance and strengthen ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management based on the best available scientific evidence, focusing on MPAs including networks of MPAs as well as MSP in the COBSEA region
<i>Measures</i>	Strengthening biodiversity conservation in line with Aichi targets, including increasing conservation of marine and coastal area to 10% in the COBSEA region. Increasing resilience to adverse impacts of climate change through coastal and marine planning and management. Facilitating the formulation of national and regional policy on ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management including MPAs and MSP. Strengthening and mainstreaming action plans for ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management including MPAs and MSP in each country, in line with national SDG actions.
<i>Activities</i>	- Review of national and regional legal and policy frameworks in the COBSEA region and recommendations for creating enabling conditions for ecosystem-based approaches; - Developing regional guidelines for an ecosystem-based approach to marine and coastal planning and management; - Building capacity on marine and coastal planning and management, including to address climate change in the coastal and marine environment; - Exchange of information, knowledge and best practice; - Establishing a COBSEA network of MPAs; - Evaluating the effectiveness of the management of MPAs.

29. This may entail particular focus on critical habitat such as coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, coastal marshes, and other areas important for fishery productivity, ensuring that ecosystem service values and costs associated with loss of such values are considered in design and implementation of policies and other measures, and identifying opportunities for use of public-private partnership approaches and catalysing investment in implementation addressing regionally identified priorities.

30. This will contribute to an enabling policy and institutional environment for integrated and ecosystem- based marine and coastal planning and management, and promoting regional cohesion and synergies. Project interventions, such as ongoing efforts towards implementation of the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme, establishment of Fishery Refugia and Marine Protected Area management, provide a foundation for further action, including efforts to enhance climate resilience of spatial conservation, in line with UNEA Resolution 2/12 on Sustainable coral reefs management.



2.3 Governance, Resource Mobilization and Partnerships

31. The East Asian Seas Action Plan identifies COBSEA as the overall authority to determine the content of the action plan, to review its progress and to approve its programme of implementation (paragraph 52). It further, *inter alia*, identifies COBSEA's role in providing information and guidance on the coordination of coastal and marine environmental activities (paragraph 52.6); and in exploring the feasibility of development and adoption of suitable legal frameworks (paragraph 50). It also recognizes assessment and monitoring, data management and reporting as important underpinning activities essential for the success of the action plan; and recognizes the need for collaboration to build a foundation of knowledge and experience for the East Asian Seas region (paragraph 51).

32. The governance theme reinforces COBSEA's role as a catalyst of actions that support regional delivery of the SDGs and in particular SDG 14. This includes aligning regional marine and coastal ecological objectives and actions with the 2030 Agenda, and using COBSEA as the regional mechanism for supporting planning, tracking and reporting on relevant SDGs, in line with paragraph 5 of UNEA Resolution 2/10¹⁰ and drawing on guidance provided by UN Environment¹¹. Regional objectives, goals and targets established in the context of the East Asian Seas Action Plan have been tentatively mapped against SDGs and their targets. Further development of the regional policy framework through review and revision of existing or development of new policy instruments may be pursued on this basis. It may also include expanding participation in and area coverage of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, in line with paragraphs 12 and 13 of Resolution 2/10 of the UNEA¹².

¹⁰ UNEA-2/10, paragraph 5, *inter alia*, invites Member States and regional seas conventions and action plans to work towards the implementation of and reporting on ocean-related SDGs and associated targets

¹¹ UN Environment (2017): *Moving to Strategy and Action: Regional Seas Outlook for the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*

33. By serving as a forum for exchange of experiences, policy and practice related to the two substantive themes, COBSEA's role as a regional policy mechanism is strengthened. Its value to participating countries as a sustainability mechanism for project activities is also enhanced, in terms of policy uptake as well as in terms of legacy activities related to data and knowledge outputs and networks of experts and institutions.

34. Priorities under the governance theme are as follows:

<i>Purpose</i>	Provide an effective regional policy mechanism for the coastal and marine environment
<i>Measures</i>	Regional objectives and associated actions towards achievement of SDGs relevant to COBSEA substantive themes Regional forum for exchange of experiences, policy and practice, related to COBSEA substantive themes
<i>Activities</i>	i. Preparation of a regional SDG Implementation Outlook focusing on COBSEA substantive themes; ii. Regional follow-up and review of progress in implementation of the outlook; iii. Information sharing, communication and outreach, including development and implementation of a brief communication and outreach strategy, and redeveloped COBSEA web presence for regular information sharing with participating countries, partner institutions and other stakeholders; iv. Review and updating of existing and/or development of new policy instruments; v. Analysis of COBSEA Secretariat requirements for effective delivery of the Strategic Directions and development of a plan for strengthening human capacity and resource mobilization.

Resource Mobilization and Partnerships

35. The East Asian Seas Trust Fund was established in 1982 to provide financial support for the Action Plan. Participating countries make annual financial contributions to the Trust Fund in line with decision 1 of the 21st Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA. The Trust Fund supports core functions of COBSEA including the Secretariat and Intergovernmental Meetings. However, at current contribution levels this provides only the minimum required and does not encompass funding for activities, including project development.

36. A plan for strengthening resource mobilization and enhancing COBSEA Secretariat in terms of human capacity will therefore be developed. The strategy may encompass consideration of revising the scale of national contributions to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund; establishment and resourcing of an additional activity trust fund for the

¹² UNEA-2/10, paragraph 12, encourages Member States to become parties to regional seas conventions and action plans; paragraph 13 encourages Regional Seas to consider increasing the coverage of the Regional Seas instruments.

East Asian Seas Action Plan (as in the case of North West Pacific Action Plan); development of framework funding agreements with bilateral or other donors; and placing emphasis on development and resourcing of regional projects addressing priorities in the COBSEA Strategic Directions. Expanding the pool of partners funding the work of COBSEA is important. In line with paragraph 69 of the Action Plan, this may, for example, include broadening the basis of bilateral donors; broadening funding obtained from multilateral funds, including GEF resources beyond the International Waters focal area, exploring projects funded through the Green Climate Fund as well as development banks; increasing collaboration with philanthropy organizations, and expanding private sector collaboration and investment. It may also encompass joint fundraising with partners where such a basis exists, e.g. in the context of the UN-ASEAN Work Plan or other partnership agreements.

37. COBSEA is recognized as the sole decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan, with a mandate that also encompasses coordination of coastal and marine initiatives in the region, facilitating policy development, and development and implementation of projects. Key to fulfilling this mandate is strong partnerships with national and regional institutions on specific aspects of the Strategic Direction. It may also include exploring establishment of regional centres of excellence hosted by participating countries, drawing on the model for Regional Activity Centres established in the context of other Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and in line with paragraph 63 of the Action Plan.

38. COBSEA participates in UN Environment's Regional Seas Programme, and through that engages in global coordination and collaboration on regional ocean governance as well as development and use of indicators and reporting that support tracking of SDG implementation. It also enables leveraging of UN Environment's global efforts in relation to land-based pollution, ecosystem-based management, MPAs, MSP, coral reefs and blue carbon.

39. Enhanced collaboration and synergies may be explored especially with NOWPAP, which adjoins COBSEA, and shares some participating countries as well as thematic priorities with COBSEA. Deepened partnership with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) may be defined based on the UN-ASEAN Action Plan under development, drawing on COBSEA's past engagement in the ASEAN Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment and with the ASEAN Environment Division, including in relation to marine litter and SDG tracking and reporting. Efforts to tackle marine litter arising from fisheries requires engagement with Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) and Asia Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC). Efforts in relation to coastal and marine planning and management can be strengthened through information sharing, coordination or partnerships e.g. with SEAFDEC and APFIC in relation to fisheries refugia; Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) in relation to municipal level ICZM; and the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) and ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) in relation to marine protected areas. Efforts to tackle marine litter arising from international shipping should be administered through the relevant International Maritime Organization (IMO) instruments. Collaboration may be deepened with PEMSEA specifically in relation to investment, to more effectively leverage the foundation provided by Strategic Action Programmes developed through GEF projects.



3

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

40. Guided by COBSEA participating countries through the Intergovernmental Meeting, the COBSEA Secretariat is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Strategic Directions as well as related monitoring and evaluation. The purpose of monitoring and evaluation is to measure progress made towards indicative outputs and intended outcomes; assess performance; and enable adaptive approaches in implementation of the Strategic Directions. Monitoring and evaluation will also support efforts to communicate action taken through COBSEA and showcase results, and will contribute to sharing of best practices across participating countries, among Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and other partners.

41. The COBSEA Secretariat will conduct annual assessment of progress made towards implementation of the Strategic Directions, and communicate findings and actions taken to participating countries. This will be largely desk-based, drawing on published material, reporting on projects and other activities, as well as consultation with participating countries and partners.

42. The COBSEA Secretariat will present monitoring and evaluation reports on implementation of the Strategic Directions to Intergovernmental Meetings, including recommended action to be taken, for the consideration of participating countries.

43. A Terminal Evaluation of the Strategic Directions will be carried out in its last year. This will serve both as a performance evaluation of the present Strategic Directions and a formative evaluation for the development future Strategic Directions. The terminal evaluation will, subject to availability of resources, be externally commissioned and carried out in close consultation with the COBSEA Secretariat as well as Participating Countries.

ANNEXES

Annex A. Relevant Regional Organizations and Initiatives

Regional organizations, initiatives and partnerships addressing marine environmental degradation and development in the East Asian Seas region or among countries participating in the East Asian Seas Action Plan include the following:

- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the regional development arm of the United Nations. ESCAP promotes regional cooperation and collective action in pursuit of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals, including through analysis, policy recommendations, technical assistance and capacity building;
- The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), established to accelerate economic development and trade, and promote peace, collaboration and trust. The ASEAN Working Group on the Coastal and Marine Environment focuses on marine water quality standards, establishment of a representative network of marine protected areas, fisheries capacity, capability and economic benefits, and cooperation in addressing pollution. The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity facilitates regional cooperation, capacity building and provision of information and tools in relation to biodiversity conservation;
- The North West Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), adopted in 1994 by the People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. Four Regional Activity Centres focus on Data and Information Network; Marine Environmental Emergency Preparedness and Response; Special Monitoring and Coastal Environmental Assessment; and Pollution Monitoring. Activities include a regional initiative on marine litter;
- The Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific of the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission (IOC/WESTPAC), which promotes ocean knowledge and sustained ocean observations and services for the improvement of ocean governance;
- The Asia-Pacific Fishery Commission (APFIC), which works to improve understanding, awareness and cooperation in fisheries issues in the Asia-Pacific region;
- The Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC), focusing in particular on transfer of new technologies, research, information dissemination and capacity building to develop and manage the fisheries potential of the region;
- Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), with a primary focus on developing integrated coastal management, including through a range of pilot sites mainly at the municipal level, as well as provision of related tools and support to partnership processes;
- The Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries and Food Security (CTI-CFF), focusing on coral reef protection, management and rehabilitation, including through marine protected areas, fisheries management, and climate change adaptation; and
- Mangroves for the Future (MFF), a regional partnership for strengthening resilience of ecosystem dependent communities through knowledge management and dissemination, empowerment and integrated management approaches, using mangroves as a flagship ecosystem.

Annex B. Relevant UN Environment GEF projects

UN Environment GEF International Waters projects directly contributing to implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan include the following:

- projects towards implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea, including 'Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea', which addresses the habitat, land-based pollution and regional coordination components of the Strategic Action Programme, and is starting in 2017; 'Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand', which started in 2016 and implements the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Programme, executed by SEAFDEC; and a number of medium sized projects targeted at demonstration sites identified in the Strategic Action Programme;
- 'Targeted Research for Improving Understanding of the Global Nitrogen Cycle towards the Establishment of an International Nutrient Management System', which aims to improve the understanding of the global and regional nitrogen cycle and investigate and test practices and management policies at the regional, national and local levels with a view to reduce negative impacts of reactive nitrogen on the ecosystems. The project will include target sites in the East Asian Seas region.
- 'Standardized Methodologies for Carbon Accounting and Ecosystem Services Valuation of Blue Forests', which aims to apply methodologies and approaches for carbon accounting and ecosystem service valuation in blue forests so as to provide evidence-based experience that supports replication, up-scaling and adoption of blue forests concepts by the international community and the GEF, and includes target sites in the East Asian Seas region.
- 'Addressing Marine Plastics – A Systemic Approach', which aims to capitalize on a growing baseline of knowledge on marine plastics sources, pathways and environmental impacts to inform the GEF and the application of a systemic approach to global plastic issues, which includes target countries in the East Asian Seas region; and
- an emerging project to apply an inter-regional The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB) approach for oceans and coasts, to catalyze actions that fully integrate the value of marine and coastal ecosystems.

Annex C. Sustainable Development Goals relevant to COBSEA

SDG 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development", is immediately relevant to the East Asian Seas Action Plan and the work of COBSEA.

SDG 14 targets and indicators are summarized below¹³.

Target

Top level indicator

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

14.1.1 Index of Coastal Eutrophication (ICEP) and Floating Plastic debris Density

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 in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans

14.2.1 Proportion of national Exclusive Economic Zones managed using ecosystem-based approaches

14.3 Minimize and address the impacts of ocean acidification, including through enhanced scientific cooperation at all levels

14.3.1 Average marine acidity (pH) measured at agreed suite of representative sampling stations

14.4 By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics

14.4.1 Proportion of fish stocks within biologically sustainable levels

14.5 By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information

14.5.1 Coverage of protected areas in relation to marine areas

¹³ Final list of proposed Sustainable Development Goal indicators, as contained in Annex IV of the Report of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators, E/CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1

Target

14.6 By 2020, prohibit certain forms of fisheries subsidies which contribute to overcapacity and overfishing, eliminate subsidies that contribute to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and refrain from introducing new such subsidies, recognizing that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least developed countries should be an integral part of the World Trade Organization fisheries subsidies negotiation

14.7 By 2030, increase the economic benefits to small island developing States and least developed countries from the sustainable use of marine resources, including through sustainable management of fisheries, aquaculture and tourism

14.a Increase scientific knowledge, develop research capacity and transfer marine technology, taking into account the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Criteria and Guidelines on the Transfer of Marine Technology, in order to improve ocean health and to enhance the contribution of marine biodiversity to the development of developing countries, in particular small island developing States and least developed countries

14.b Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets

14.c Enhance the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources by implementing international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which provides the legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and their resources, as recalled in paragraph 158 of "The future we want"

Top level indicator

14.6.1 Progress by countries in the degree of implementation of international instruments aiming to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing

14.7.1 Sustainable fisheries as a percentage of GDP in small island developing States, least developed countries and all countries

14.a.1 Proportion of total research budget allocated to research in the field of marine technology

14.b.1 Progress by countries in the degree of application of a legal/regulatory/policy/institutional framework which recognizes and protects access rights for small-scale fisheries

14.c.1 Number of countries making progress in ratifying, accepting and implementing through legal, policy and institutional frameworks, ocean-related instruments that implement international law, as reflected in UNCLOS, for the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans and their resources

Other SDGs and associated targets relevant to the East Asian Seas Action Plan include:

- SDG 1, especially target 1.5 on building resilience and reducing exposure and vulnerability to climate related extreme events environmental shocks and disasters;
- SDG 2, especially target 2.4 on sustainable food production systems;
- SDG 5, especially target 5.a on giving women equal rights to resources;
- SDG 6, especially targets 6.3 on improving water quality; 6.5 on integrated water resources management, including through transboundary cooperation; and 6.6 on protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems;
- SDG 7, especially targets 7.2 on renewable energy and 7.a on international cooperation to facilitate access to clean energy research and technology;
- SDG 8 especially targets 8.3 on supporting productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation; 8.4 on resource efficiency in consumption and production and decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation; and 8.9 on sustainable tourism;
- SDG 11, especially target 11.6 on reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management;
- SDG 12, especially targets 12.2 on sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources and 12.4 on environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle;
- SDG 13, especially targets 13.1 on strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters and 13.2 on integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning;
- SDG 17, especially targets 17.16 on enhancing multi-stakeholder partnerships to support the achievement of the SDGs and 17.18 on enhancing capacity-building support.

Annex D. Individuals Consulted in Development of the Strategic Directions

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