



Report of the Second Meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)

21 – 22 October 2024, Siem Reap, Cambodia

UNEP/COBSEA WGMCE 2/4



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The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) is a regional intergovernmental mechanism and one of 18 Regional Seas programmes. It is the decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan, bringing together nine countries – Cambodia, People’s Republic of China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Viet Nam – in protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment. COBSEA focuses on marine pollution, ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management, and ocean governance. The COBSEA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, Thailand and administered by UNEP. www.cobsea.org

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Introduction

The Second Meeting of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE) was held on 21-22 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia, as a hybrid format, with participation of Working Group focal points and representatives of COBSEA countries, UNEP colleagues, as well as UNEP/GEF South China Sea – Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) project, The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UN DOALOS), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Reef World Foundation. The meeting was to discuss progress of marine and coastal ecosystems activities since the First Meeting of the WGMCE held on 13 September 2023 in Bali, Indonesia.

The Secretariat presented the first biennial workplan 2025-2026 for the implementation of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework, and it was developed during the WGMCE-2 for presentation at the Twenty-sixth Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA (IGM 26), which was held on 23-25 October 2024 in Siem Reap following WGMCE-2. The WGMCE-2 provided an opportunity for several discussions on national, regional, and global initiatives from COBSEA participating countries, UNEP Headquarters, the GEF South China Seas Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project, Convention on Biological Diversity, and the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UN DOALOS). WGMCE-2 also served as a knowledge sharing platform, facilitated by SwAM, on Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP), Marine Protected Area (MPA) Networks, and Other-Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) to support countries for enhanced understanding and development of marine and coastal spatial planning and management in the region as well as to support achieving targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals. This report summarizes discussions and input provided at the Meeting, main outcomes and follow up actions. The slide deck for the meeting can be found [here](#).

1. Opening of the Meeting

Ms. Margarita Victoria Caballa, COBSEA Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Programme Lead, opened the hybrid Meeting at 09h00 (UTC +7) in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

Ms. Caballa presented the provisional agenda of the meeting, presented as working document UNEP/COBSEA WGMCE 2/1 ([Annex 1](#)) which has been circulated to delegates in accordance with the Rules of Procedure applicable to the Meeting, which is 4 weeks in advance of the meeting.

1.1. Opening Remarks by Cambodia

Mr. Meas Rithy, Deputy Director, Department of Marine and Coastal Zone Management of the Ministry of Environment of Cambodia, provided opening remarks as a representative of the host country of the WGMCE-2 and IGM 26. Mr. Rithy welcomed all participants both in the meeting room and online to the Second Meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE-2). Mr. Rithy highlighted the importance of collaboration among countries for regional conservation on marine and coastal ecosystems and livelihood for local communities.

1.2. Introduction of participants

Ms. Caballa proceeded to invite each participant to introduce themselves, WGMCE first, in order of country. Ms. Caballa also recognized observers who were present in the meeting, including

UNEP colleagues, UNEP/GEF SCS-SAP Project, SwAM, Sida, UN DOALOS, ADB, CBD, and the Reef World Foundation. The list of participants is found in [Annex 2](#).

1.3. Opening Remarks by the COBSEA Secretariat

Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, COBSEA Coordinator, expressed his appreciation to the host country Cambodia. Mr. Pradhan highlighted the progress since the adoption of the MCE Framework in April 2023 and since the first meeting of the working group on marine and coastal ecosystems (WGMCE-1), including the synergy of GEF SCS-SAP. Mr. Pradhan highlighted key agenda items and purpose of the WGMCE-2 meeting, including the discussion on the development of the first biennial workplan 2025-2026, national, regional, and global knowledge exchange related to the marine and coastal ecosystems for continued collaborative efforts and contribution to achieving global targets from Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, SDGs, and the 30x30 target.



Figure 1 The Second Meeting of Marine and Coastal Ecosystems of the COBSEA, Siem Reap, Cambodia, 21-22 Oct 2024

2. Organization of Work

2.1. Confirmation of Meeting Chair and Rapporteur

The Secretariat opened the confirmation of Meeting Chair and Rapporteur. The Bureau was elected by the Meeting, as follows:

Chair: Mr. Meas Rithy, Deputy Director of Coastal Zone and Marine Conservation, Directorate of Natural Protected Area, Cambodia

Rapporteur: Mr. Ranjeet Singh, Division Director (International Policy) and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Singapore to UN Environment Programme, Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, Singapore

2.2. Presentation of Meeting Documents

Ms. Caballa gave a rundown of the list of Meeting Documents distributed 4 weeks prior to the meeting, presented as the working document [UNEP/COBSEA WGMCE 2/2](#).

3. Country Updates related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

The WGMCE focal points presented country updates related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework, including national best practices and lessons learned, and priorities for the next 2 years. The objective of the session was to provide a platform for experience exchange and learning among COBSEA participating countries. When available, the PowerPoint presentations are linked to this report for further perusal of the WGMCE.

The delegate of **Cambodia**, Mr. Sum Dara, presented a case study on Cambodia's mangrove management and restoration efforts, highlighting the successful and effective implementation of community-based conservation in 57 coastal communities. The initiative established 17 Community Protected Areas (CPAs) and 40 Community Fishery Initiatives (CFIs), with the aim of protecting natural resources while empowering local communities. The delegate highlighted key challenges, including insufficient implementation plans, weaknesses in zoning enforcement, the underdevelopment of marine spatial planning, and inadequate solid and liquid waste management. However, the initiative additionally facilitated key opportunities to strengthen policy implementation, enhance natural resource management, improve communities' livelihood, and engage private sector and development partners. Over the next two years, Cambodia will prioritize strengthening the conservation and restoration of marine resources, building capacity and cooperation at all levels, fostering community-based participation, expanding marine aquaculture, promoting a Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) mechanism, and enhancing knowledge sharing and communication. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **China**, Mr. Liao Guoxiang, shared recent advancements in marine and coastal conservation, emphasizing China's commitment to strengthening environmental protection policies and practices. Since the First Meeting of WGMCE in 2023, China has released a 2024 White Paper on Marine Eco-Environmental Protection, featuring ecological protection red lines, marine protected areas, and ecological restoration efforts. Significant legislative updates include a revised Marine Environmental Protection Law, with a dedicated chapter on marine ecological protection, and the 2023 "Guidance on comprehensively building a beautiful China," which integrates propositions to strengthen coastal and marine management. Additionally, the delegate highlighted China's commitment to international cooperation, with over 800 proposals submitted to international organizations and more than 50 cooperative agreements signed under the Belt and Road Initiative. In terms of best practices, since 2016, 175 major marine conservation projects have been implemented, restoring 1,680 kilometers of coastline and 50,000 hectares of coastal wetlands. Additionally, the 2020-2025 Special Action Plan for Mangrove Forests has led to the establishment of 7,000 hectares of new mangrove areas. As part of the Beautiful Bays initiative, bay-specific policies have been adopted to coordinate nearshore pollution control, eco-conservation, and beach restoration. Over the next 2 years, China's priorities include improving marine conservation systems, conducting ecological environment monitoring and conservation effectiveness evaluations, continuing to implement marine and coastal ecological restoration projects, deepen regional cooperation, and advance research and practice on marine spatial planning. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Indonesia**, Ms. Nur Isna Khairunnisa, presented best practices on MPA implementation, emphasizing its significance in the country's commitment to advancing its Blue Economy. Indonesia aims to establish 32.5 million hectares of conservation areas by 2035, representing 10% of its waters, with a goal of increasing this to 30% by 2045 in line with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). As of 2022, the country has designated 452 MPAs, covering 29.28 million hectares, categorized into parks, reserves, and maritime conservation areas, with management involving over 1,400 stakeholders. To achieve its MPA targets 2045, Indonesia has developed a strategic plan that focuses on essential areas of work such as integrated planning, capacity building, and sustainable resource management in MPAs, as well as enhancing financing and communications strategies. Additionally, since 2015, Indonesia has implemented coral reef restoration initiatives at 55 locations, covering 75,471 square meters, engaging higher education institutions and local communities. Key lessons learned include the importance of an ecosystem-based and participatory approach, stakeholder collaboration, capacity building, and the use of technology for monitoring and enforcement. The delegate also highlighted ongoing challenges related to law enforcement, and the need for innovative financing. Over the next 2 years, Indonesia prioritizes consolidating its Blue Economy ecosystem through Phase II (2025-2029) of the Blue Economy Roadmap and the continuation of efforts to achieve its MPA targets for 2045. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Republic of Korea (RoK)**, Ms. Soo-Yeong Cho, showcased conservation measures established to protect marine biodiversity, including the expansion and management of MPAs as part of the KM-GBF '30 by 30' target, as well as marine habitat restoration, conservation, and management. The delegate further highlighted the completion of Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP) for 11 local governments, with performance evaluations via inspection scheduled every three years to refine and update the MCSP based on feedback. Additionally, the Republic of Korea is investigating new blue carbon sinks, specifically tidal flats, and exploring habitat restoration efforts. Over the next two years, the Republic of Korea aims to designate 30% of its jurisdictional seas as MPAs, prioritizing critical areas such as uninhabitable islands, offshore MPAs, and habitats for both migratory and sedentary marine animals. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Malaysia**, Ms. Nur Zulaikha Yusof, shared the GEF-8 Child Project, titled "*Transforming Malaysia's Port Infrastructure Development through a Nature-Centric Approach for Biodiversity Conservation and Land Degradation Control*," funded by World Wildlife Fund (WWF). This project integrates biodiversity and ecosystem resilience into Malaysia's port infrastructure policies, promoting sustainable and environmentally friendly development. The delegate shared lessons learned from this project, emphasizing the need to mainstream biodiversity conservation in port policies, implement Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) that incorporates NbS, and overcome challenges in Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) to create innovative frameworks that demonstrate the economic benefits of ecosystem-based approaches. The lack of long-term monitoring systems was identified as a barrier to effectively assess the impact of NbS. Over the next two years, Malaysia aims to further integrate biodiversity conservation strategies and NbS into national infrastructure policies. Internationally, Malaysia will align with global goals such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF), and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement to meet biodiversity and ecosystem service targets, particularly within coastal and marine ecosystems. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of the **Philippines**, Mr. Grick Cordero, showcased the management practices of the Philippines on coastal and marine resources as guided by the Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Management Programme (CMEMP) 2016-2028, the Philippines' flagship programme. CMEMP has 7 components including MPA Network Establishment and Strengthening, Biodiversity-Friendly and

Social Enterprises Development, Capacity Building, Technical Assistance, Knowledge Management, Social Marketing and Mobilization, and Monitoring and Evaluation. Under the Biodiversity-Friendly Enterprises (BDFE) programme, the Philippines promote the sustainable use of biological resources, and support over 200 people's organizations that manage different livelihoods, and ensure gender responsiveness of the said programme. The programme has been developed based on 43 balanced pillars of sustainability for implementation, including ecological integrity, economic viability, and equity, and legality. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines explore partnerships with other entities to support the business development services for local communities' livelihood and enterprises. The Philippines aim to strengthen efforts of National Coral Reef Programme, National Blue Carbon Action Partnership, 30x30 commitment, and establishment of marine science research stations. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Singapore**, Ms. Samantha Lai, shared plans to designate Singapore's second marine park at Lazarus South-Kusu Reef, which was announced on 9 May 2024. The site was identified based on Ecological Profiling Exercise (EPE), including core habitats, and highlighted that the area has importance of connectivity to habitats. Designating this national park not only allows to better protect core biodiversity sites but also provides more nature recreation, outreach, and education opportunities for the community. Singapore shared key points learned from the process of planning the marine park. Given the limited sea space of Singapore, supporting scientists to identify areas for conservation is important for good decision-making, by understanding the connectivity and biodiversity. Involving the diverse community to upstream in the planning phase was also highlighted to maximize the effectiveness and impact of the protected areas. Singapore's biodiversity conservation efforts are coordinated through the Nature Conservation Master Plan. This is further sub organized with the Marine Conservation Action Plan to focus on the marine environmental issues. The Action Plan has four main implementation thrusts: conservation of key habitats; habitat enhancement, restoration and species recover; applied research in conservation biology and planning; community stewardship and outreach. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Thailand**, Mr. Sakanan Plathong, shared experiences of developing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) training courses and training manuals for practical guidelines for capacity building. Thailand also shared the current efforts to strengthen the MSP Governance in Thailand, including the use of Rapid Assessment Methodology (RAM) to identify the needs and actions of the roadmap. Together with IOC UNESCO and WESTPAC, Thailand conducted the MSP challenge training for capacity building in April 2024. Thailand recently developed the strategic action plan for MSP for the next 10 years (2025-2034), consisting of three phases: Enabling Marine Spatial Planning Governances; MSP Implementation; and the State of Maritime National Interest Protection Report. Moreover, Thailand shared the efforts for the 30x30 commitment, through the development of the Designing Effective Locally Managed Areas in Tropical Marine Environments. Thailand aims to strengthen the locally managed marine protected areas to increase the legal MPA from the current only 5 per cent, also to increase the benefits of the locally managed areas for the communities, such as food sources and clean water, opportunities for income from marine resources and nature-based tourism, and cultural practices and values. ([Presentation](#))

The delegate of **Viet Nam**, Mr. Tran Van Hung, shared key achievements and initiatives related to marine and coastal ecosystems since the WGMCE-1. Viet Nam stressed the importance of Vietnam's Sustainable Marine Economic Development Strategy (2018-2045) for marine ecosystem conservation. Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) for Viet Nam was approved to support the sustainable development, the National Master Plan was developed to support the implementation. Viet Nam also highlighted the efforts on Coastal Environment Protection,

including coastal management, biodiversity conservation, wastewater treatment system, and fishery enhancement. Blue Economy roundtable discussions were also highlighted to address marine plastic and its supply chain to ocean. The Government of Viet Nam has recently issued Decision No.1117/QĐ-TTg approving the comprehensive master plan for sustainable exploitation and utilization of coastal resources for the period 2021-2023, with a vision towards 2050. This decision is important to Viet Nam with a coastline stretching more than 3,260 km, marine resources are important for development of country. Viet Nam aims to strengthen commitments on climate actions, biodiversity conservation, and plastic waste management by aligning with global goals and targets. ([Presentation](#))

4. Regional and Global Updates related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework

To provide an update on ongoing and planned regional and global activities, the Secretariat invited observers in the meeting to present their efforts and share knowledges related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework.

4.1 GEF South China Seas Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project

Mr. Anders Poulsen, Project Manager of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS-SAP) shared updates on the project and opened discussion of anticipated collaboration with the COBSEA Secretariat. Mr. Poulsen shared the overview of the SCS-SAP project with the project objective and three components: 1) reducing habitat degradation and loss via national and local reforms, 2) strengthening knowledge-based action planning for the management of coastal habitats and land-based pollution, and 3) facilitating regional and national level integration and cooperation for implementation of the SCS-SAP. Mr. Poulsen also explained the enhanced collaboration with SCS-SAP Regional Working Groups (RWGs) of Mangroves, Coral Reefs, Seagrass, and Coastal Wetlands and COBSEA Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE) in next 2 years. ([Presentation](#))

4.2 UN Environment Programme

Ms. Nancy Soi, Regional Seas Programme Coordinator of UNEP, provided updates on Regional Seas activities, outlining the ongoing efforts to advance the implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), with a particular focus on marine biodiversity and ecosystems, the Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE), the BBNJ Agreement, and the Global Biodiversity Framework. Key milestones included the adoption of over 20 biodiversity-related frameworks, strategies and action plans, the establishment of Regional Activity Centers (RACs) to support the implementation of Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (SPA), and the introduction of 21 indicators for coordinating monitoring and reporting. Additionally, several UNEP-Regional Seas partnership initiatives to support implementation of MEAs were cited, including the UNEP-DP Early Action Support Project for the KM-GBF, the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans Accelerator Partnership Project, and the current approach towards supporting the BBNJ Agreement. ([Presentation](#))

Mr. Ole Vestergaard, Programme Management Officer, Marine and Freshwater Branch, Ecosystems Division, UNEP and Ms. Makiko Yashiro, Regional Subprogramme Coordinator, UNEP's Regional Office of Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) shared updates on other relevant initiatives of UNEP in Asia-Pacific region and beyond, focused on Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) for healthy marine and coastal ecosystems. UNEP's approach for the Blue Economy is sustainable development and Mr. Vestergaard explained how UNEP brings SBE into action. Five elements of

SBE guide decisions and actions towards changing current unsustainable practices and developing new opportunities, which include healthy ecosystems, equitable and inclusive processes and outcomes, climate stability and resilience, sustainable consumption and production, and a circular economy approach. These need to be built into the policies, actions, and decisions related to the SBE. Guidance documents and Frameworks such as Sustainable Blue Economy Finance Initiative and SBE Target Setting Manual for Fis (2024) provide financial decision-makers across banking, insurance and investment with a science-based and actionable toolkit. MSPglobal International Guide on MSP highlights the biodiversity inclusive MSP. UNEP has launched the Marine Protected Area Tool Hub (MPATH), an educational platform to help planners and managers to navigate different steps from visioning, planning, implementing, and monitoring of MPAs, which can be used as a capacity building resource for COBSEA. Within the COBSEA region, UNEP is currently supporting Viet Nam, Indonesia, and the ASEAN in this process while also implementing several GEF-funded initiatives on Blue Economy, including in Thailand, Viet Nam, and the Philippines. ([Presentation](#))

4.3 Convention on Biological Diversity

Mr. Joseph Appiott, Coordinator for Marine, Coastal, and Island Biodiversity in the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), presented an overview of the KM-GBF, including the 23 action-orientated goals to be achieved by 2030 and their relevance to marine and coastal ecosystems. Mr. Appiott emphasized the critical role of National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans (NBSAPs) in implementing the KM-GBF and provided updates on the activities of the CBD Secretariat to advance its implementation. This included the 2023 Sustainable Ocean Initiative regional capacity-building workshop held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, activities related to international partnerships, such as those with the International Maritime Organization, and updates on the CBD COP 16. Additionally, the potential support and role of the CBD in implementing the BBNJ Agreement were highlighted, with an emphasis on the synergies between the KM-GBF and the BBNJ Agreement. ([Presentation](#))

4.4 Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) by UN DOALOS

Ms. Athina Chanaki of the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (UN DOALOS) presented an overview of the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement), including the ratification process and the Agreement's 4 main components: Marine Genetic Resources, Area-Based Management Tools, Environmental Impact Assessments, and Capacity Building & Transfer of Marine Technology. Additionally, Ms. Chanaki emphasized the significance of the BBNJ Agreement in tackling cross-sectoral issues, such as climate change, as well as its essential contributions towards global goals, including KM-GBF '30 by 30' target and SDG 14. Other key points included the Agreement's approach to addressing the unequal capacities of states to participate in activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction, as well as the critical importance of taking early action in implementation. ([Presentation](#))

5. Knowledge Sharing on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Topics

The Secretariat opened the knowledge sharing session on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems by inviting experts from the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) to provide countries with knowledge and experience with Other Regional Seas Programme on Marine Spatial Planning (MSP), Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) Network and Design, as well as Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs). The aim of the session was to introduce the WGMCE-2 of opportunities that countries can undertake for the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

with the support of SwAM as well as other agencies, and to support achieving global targets from the SDGs and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

5.1 Tackling transboundary Marine Spatial Planning

Ms. Ingela Isaksson, Senior Analyst in the Ocean and Climate, International Affairs in the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), presented on tackling transboundary Marine Spatial Planning. Jenny Hertzman, Marine Ecologist in The Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) provided comments and additional insights after the presentation. ([Presentation](#))

5.2 The Swedish approach to MPA Network Design and Management

Ms. Otilia Thoreson, Senior Analyst of the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM), shared the Swedish approach to MPA Network Design and Management. To implement the GBF, many countries are moving from individual MPAs to MPA networks to achieve conservation goals more effectively and efficiently. Ms. Thoreson provided the definition and importance of the network of MPAs and shared an example from Sweden, stressing that ecological representative, connectivity, and functionality are key for analysis. COBSEA Situational Analysis of Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas (2022) was also mentioned as an example by highlighting how the East Asian Seas region has different types of MPA networks. To address the MPA network, establishing the National Framework was stressed as the most important action, which clearly sets out processes, definitions, and concepts, to enable the planning, monitoring, and management of MPAs. For the foundation of the framework following were presented: collective understanding, shared language; functionality; identifying nested targets; ecological representativity; connectivity; and effective management. WIOPAN, Western Indian Ocean Marine Protected Area Professional Network, was introduced as an example that aims to improve existing MPAs through mentorship programmes and online courses. SwAM opened the floor for discussion, on what is needed to roll out a regional approach to an MPA network in the East Asian Seas region. Ms. Jenny Hertzman, Marine Ecologist in the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) also provided comments and additional insights after the presentation online, by highlighting the importance of integrated marine management, getting evidence-based, results-based management that makes the MPAs as efficient as possible. ([Presentation](#))

5.3 Common understanding of OECMs in the Baltic Sea - Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures

Ms. Thoreson presented how to build a common understanding of the Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) with an example from the Baltic Sea. Ms. Thoreson provided the definition and criteria of OECMs, shared experience from the HELCOM, the Helsinki Commission, and the experience from the Nairobi Convention. CBD decision 14/8 adopted the definition of an OECMs as “a geographically defined area other than a protected area”. Over 2/3 of the countries don't have existing strategies for OECMs in place, but most of these countries have plans. The Philippines recently drafted the OECM guidelines that will provide the criteria to determine which parts of the sea and land are considered as OECMs. Currently, the Philippines has 1.42% of its oceans effectively managed, but the Philippines were able to identify areas to increase that contribute to 30x30 commitment, they were able to fill it up to almost 16% because of the OECMs they have identified. HELCOM's process to reach a common understanding of OECMs was presented as an example with the Baltic Sea Action Plan, which defines how OECMs can support the coherence of the Baltic Sea MPA network. HELCOM Regional OECM Workshop was aimed to

map opportunities and challenges and establish an initial regional understanding of criteria, and brought achievements on raising the profile of OECMs across the region, increasing interest and understanding of OECMs across relevant sectors, and starting the development of a shared vision of OECMs, with the development of Decision tree to support countries in their identification of OECMs. The role of the OECMs in the Western Indian Ocean was introduced to develop awareness initiatives on the role of OECMs in supporting the region in meeting its GBF targets. WGMCE shared the current national actions and plans to support OECMs. ([Presentation](#))

6. Progress towards implementation of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework

The Secretariat provided update on the progress towards implementation of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework, which was adopted on 10 April 2023. The Secretariat shared the updates on the interim workplan 2023-2024, project designs and concepts, and the first biennial workplan 2025-2026 for the implementation of the MCE Framework to be developed during the WGMCE-2. The Development of the first biennial workplan for implementation of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework 2025-2026 is found in working document [UNEP/COBSEA WGMCE 2/3](#).

6.1 Updates on the interim workplan 2023-2024

The Secretariat presented the updates on the interim workplan 2023-2024. The interim workplan consists of the thematic areas (i.e. working group on marine and coastal ecosystems, blue economy, marine and coastal spatial planning, marine protected areas, marine and coastal habitat conservation and rehabilitation, and others) of the MCE Framework. Most of the activities in the Interim Workplan was focused on resource mobilization and partnership efforts in line with the listed concepts. The final updates on the interim workplan is found in [Annex 3](#).

6.2 Consultation on Project Development and Resource Mobilization

The Secretariat presented the different proposals of the project designs and concepts and sought insights and recommendations from the WGMCE.

The Secretariat expressed that in the last year, they have developed several proposals for funding opportunities to finance the different elements of the MCE Framework. Among the opportunities include the following:

- a full-sized proposal for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Project focused on integrating Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in the Blue Economy entitled “The Blue Way for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in the Seas of East Asia” (Blue SMEs);
- Korean ODA Project concept paper entitled “Coral Voyages: Enhancing Inclusive and Responsible Marine Ecotourism for Local Communities and Ecosystem Conservation in the East Asian Seas” (Coral Voyages);
- discussions with the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) who are interested in supporting activities within the MCE Framework, including the MCSP, MPA, and OECMs, “Upscaling Ocean Governance and Blue Economy in the East Asian Seas”;
- Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning;
- Marine Protected Area (MPA) and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs);
- Other Biodiversity-related Activities – BBNJ (The Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction Agreement)

The WGMCE provided comments and questions on the project designs and concepts presented by the Secretariat. Following the consultation, the WGMCE shall keep the BBNJ topic under abeyance highlighting three factors: needs of further discussion and consideration of the mandate and role of COBSEA on BBNJ; the interest of COBSEA countries; and the resourcing needs and potential duplication of efforts. The WGMCE also advised the Secretariat to streamline project designs when submitting to potential funding opportunities. The WGMCE also highlighted the importance of incorporating gender responsiveness into project designs and other COBSEA activities to support Target 23 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF). This target aims to ensure gender equality in implementing the Framework through a gender-responsive approach.

6.3 Draft biennial workplan for implementation of the MCE Framework 2025-2026

The Secretariat presented the draft of the first biennial workplan for implementation of the MCE Framework 2025-2026 for its finalization. The biennial workplan consists of the thematic areas (i.e. working group on marine and coastal ecosystems, blue economy, marine and coastal spatial planning, marine protected areas, marine and coastal habitat conservation and restoration, and other biodiversity-related activities) of the MCE Framework. The biennial workplan supports the implementation of the MCE Framework for the next two years, enabling an adaptive approach, strengthening progress on issues, ensuring responsiveness to global-level developments, and reducing risk for duplication of effort. This further provides the Secretariat with concrete guidance on priorities that will form the basis to develop projects for the region and upon request and subject to availability of funds, develop relevant national activities in participating countries.

The WGMCE provided comments and additional recommendations to further develop the draft biennial workplan for its adoption at the IGM 26. The final agreed content of the draft biennial workplan is found in [Annex 4](#).

7. Any Other Business

- Discussion methods for regular updates between COBSEA and countries

The WGMCE proposed a 6-month progress report from the COBSEA Secretariat to the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems. The WGMCE also suggested that the Secretariat can continue to contact individual countries of the Working Group if the need arises, without necessarily requiring to go through the 6-month progress report.

- Regional Activity Center related to biodiversity topics

The Secretariat reminded the WGMCE to consider the establishment of the Regional Activity Centre related to biodiversity topic. The Secretariat highlighted the need for the establishment of RAC for the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems, since the other Working Group on Marine Litter has one in Indonesia, Bali.

8. Next Meeting of the WGMCE

The Secretariat shared that the Third Meeting of the WGMCE (WGMCE-3) would be held in 2025. Agenda items would include updates on project development, updates on the biennial workplan 2025-2026, and the integration process for SCS-SAP RWGs with WGMCE. The preparations for WGMCE-3 will be coordinated with the SCS-SAP Project.

9. Summary and recommendations for the Twenty-sixth Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM 26)

- **Biennial Workplan 2025-2026:** The Secretariat would present the first biennial workplan for implementation of the MCE Framework 2025-2026 at the IGM 26 for its adoption, by reflecting the comments and recommendations from the WGMCE.

10. Closing of the Meeting

Mr. Pradhan congratulated the WGMCE for successfully holding the second working group meeting with great discussion and emphasized that MCE will be further discussed at the IGM 26. Mr. Pradhan highlighted opportunities that can strengthen the work of the WGMCE and the MCE programme, by aligning with the COP 16 is taking place in Colombia, and the third UN Ocean Conference is expected to be hosted by France in 2025, where different synergies and aspects related to the Triple Planetary Crisis, including the GBF and BBNJ Agreement, where efforts on MCE will be closely related. Mr. Pradhan thanked WGMCE for sharing inputs and discussions and highlighted the possible synergies with SCS-SAP.

Mr. Rithy thanked all participants for the cooperation and support of the WGMCE-2 and closed the meeting of the Second Meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA).

Annex 1: Agenda of the Second Meeting of the WGMCE

1. Opening of the Meeting
 - 1.1. Opening Remarks by Cambodia
 - 1.2. Introduction of participants
 - 1.3. Opening Remarks by the COBSEA Secretariat
2. Organization of Work
 - 2.1. Confirmation of Meeting Chair and Rapporteur
 - 2.2. Presentation of Meeting Documents
3. Country Updates related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework
4. Regional and Global Updates Related to the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework
 - 4.1. GEF South China Seas Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project
 - 4.2. UN Environment Programme
 - 4.3. Convention on Biological Diversity
 - 4.4. Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) by UN DOALOS
5. Knowledge Sharing on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Topics
 - 5.1. Tackling transboundary Marine Spatial Planning
 - 5.2. The Swedish approach to MPA Network Design and Management
 - 5.3. Common understanding of OECMs in the Baltic Sea – Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures
6. Progress towards implementation of the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework
 - 6.1. Updates on the interim workplan
 - 6.2. Consultation on Project Development and Resource Mobilization
 - 6.3. Draft biennial workplan for implementation of the MCE Framework 2025-2026
7. Any other business
8. Next Meeting of the WGMCE
9. Summary and recommendations for the Twenty-sixth Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM 26)
10. Closing of the Meeting

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Annex 3: Interim Workplan 2023-2024

Activity	Lead Entities and Roles	Funding Source	Interim Workplan					Status / Remarks
			2023	2024				
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems								
Workshop on the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework	UNEP & CBD	CBD						Due to constraints from CBD side, the workshop has been put on hold. UNEP Headquarters have indicated possibility of support through the GEF Biodiversity portfolio.
Blue Economy								
Submission of a full-sized project proposal to the Global Environment Facility. Project will focus on mainstreaming blue economy by including small and medium enterprises (SME)	COBSEA to develop a full proposal in consultation with the participating countries through the WGMCE.	UNEP and ADB GEF for PPG in case PIF is approved						The project was designed and consulted with COBSEA participating countries. The first presentation was during the WGMCE-1, followed by an online meeting on 18 April, for which the participating countries reiterated their interest in this project. The project concept is currently with UNEP HQ for review before submission to GEF.
Implementation of GEF Project.	COBSEA to lead the implementation. WGMCE to liaise with the participating countries on its implementation Participating countries might require	GEF in case project is approved						Anticipated PPG stage for 2025 if accepted by GEF.
Integration of Blue Economy Components in the Tourism Sector	COBSEA	Korean ODA						Submitted for Korean ODA approval a project focused on improving sustainability in the marine ecotourism sector, targeting Indonesia and the Philippines.
Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP)								
Marine Protected Areas (MPA)								
Mainstreaming coral reef tourism code of conduct at regional,	COBSEA	Blue Natural Capital						Green Fins training of trainers for 2 locals in Bali. Green Fins assessors training for 4 new assessors for Indonesia.

Activity	Lead Entities and Roles	Funding Source	Interim Workplan					Status / Remarks
			'23	2024				
			Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
national, and local levels using Green Fins Best practice	Reef World to support in on the ground mainstreaming of the Green Fins	Financing Facility (BNCFF)						More than 50 dive operators in Indonesia are assessed or in the process of being assessed as Green Fins members. Ongoing development of the feasibility study and business plan for marine ecotourism.
Marine Protected Area Networking for the East Asian Seas.		Blue Nature Alliance						The Secretariat participated in the Global MPA Network Meeting last February 2024 for potential partnerships and support on this topic. The Secretariat continuous to participate in the monthly meetings for this endeavour.
Marine and Coastal Habitat Conservation and Restoration								
Harmonized coral reef monitoring for the East Asian Seas	COBSEA, GCRMN, UNEP HQ	UNEP HQ (GFCR)						Unfortunately, COBSEA was not successful in being selected for CORDAP funding. Nevertheless, the Secretariat is now in close communication with the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) and UNEP HQ who will be able to provide support on coral reef monitoring protocol and training through the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR).
Others								
Webinar on Marine Mammal Management Toolkit	Ocean Governance 4 MPAs	N/A						Conducted a webinar last 29 November in partnership with UN ESCAP / NEAMPAN.

Annex 4: Biennial Workplan for the Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework 2025-2026

I. Background

1. The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (MCE) Framework was adopted through silence procedure on 10 April 2023 following the resolution from Part 2 of the Twenty-fifth Intergovernmental Meeting. A Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems (WGMCE) was established as part of the MCE Framework, composed of experts, and contact persons from the participating countries specialized in marine and coastal management. To guide the formulation of substantive related activities in the East Asian Seas, Section 2.3 Functions states that the WGMCE shall develop a biennial workplan to determine the specific activities and targets to be approved by the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM).
2. The biennial workplan supports the implementation of the MCE Framework for the next two years, enabling an adaptive approach, strengthening progress on issues, ensuring responsiveness to global-level developments, and reducing risk for duplication of effort. This further provides the Secretariat with concrete guidance on priorities that will form the basis to develop projects for the region and upon request and subject to availability of funds, develop relevant national activities in participating countries.
3. The First Meeting of the WGMCE (WGMCE-1) held on 13 September 2023 in Bali, Indonesia, agreed on the workplan format and developed an interim workplan to jumpstart activities in the implementation of the MCE Framework for 2023-2024. The participating countries developed further the biennial workplan for 2025-2026 on the Second Meeting of the WGMCE (WGMCE-2) held on 21-22 October 2024 and adopted at the Twenty-sixth Intergovernmental Meeting of COBSEA (IGM 26) held on 23-25 October 2024 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

II. Biennial workplan 2025-2026 for implementation of the MCE Framework 2025-2026

4. The biennial workplan continues with the agreed format from WGMCE-1, structured along the thematic areas of the MCE Framework and listing recommended actions per thematic area. The workplan also identifies the roles of the WGMCE, countries, and Secretariat; timeframe for implementation; and funding sources. The workplan may emphasize activities participating countries will collectively pursue because they are regional in nature or require coherent national effort. At the national level, countries may further develop activities to address national priorities and needs, and report on such efforts through the WGMCE.
5. Section 8 Implementation Strategy and Funding Mechanisms of the COBSEA MCE Framework indicate that the COBSEA Secretariat shall seek out fund from donors and grants to support development and implementation of the project and activities aligned with the Framework. As such, the draft biennial workplan is focused on project development and resources mobilization, opening opportunities to explore activities across the thematic areas of the MCE Framework.

Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems

6. Upon adoption of the MCE Framework, several agencies have offered opportunities to provide support to the WGMCE in terms of training and capacity building. For the upcoming biennium, COBSEA will continue discussions and collaboration for potential capacity building efforts that will strengthen the capacity of the members of the WGMCE in their functions within their countries and the region.
7. COBSEA is strengthening collaboration with the GEF South China Seas – Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project. The SCS-SAP Project has established several Regional Working Groups on the different habitats that surround the region. In the next biennium, COBSEA and the SCS-SAP Project will explore linkages and intersection between common goals and activities, fostering partnership and knowledge sharing on marine and coastal management.

Blue Economy

8. The Secretariat aims to continue the development and later implementation of the proposed Blue SMEs project under GEF. Demonstration sites for this project will be in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, with regional learning exchange to expand opportunity with China, Republic of Korea, and Singapore. Upon submission and successful endorsement, the Project Preparation Stage (PPG) to set-up the project will likely occur in 2025-2026.
9. Likewise, the Secretariat aims to finalize the development and later implementation of the Korean ODA proposed project Coral Voyages. Based on RoK priority, the project demonstration will focus on Indonesia and the Philippines with a regional learning exchange component to involve all COBSEA participating countries. If selected, the 5-year project will likely start in 2026.
10. Countries are invited to reach out to the COBSEA Secretariat for any support they might need in relation to Sustainable Blue Economy, including potential participation in the Sustainable Blue Economy organized by the Regional Seas Programme.

Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning

11. The Secretariat will continue to explore opportunities that will support participating countries and the East Asian Seas region in achieving Target 1 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework on marine and coastal spatial planning. The Secretariat has been communicating with the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management (SwAM) for potential joint efforts on this topic. SwAM participated in WGMCE-2 to present success and learning in conducting marine spatial planning in other Regional Seas Programmes.

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)

12. The BNCF-funded project on Green Fins in Bali, Indonesia is anticipated to end by the first quarter of 2025. By then, the project would have identified the socio-economic impact of sustainable dive practices and increased the capacity of local communities in Bali to improve scuba dive tourism practices. A National Green Fins workshop is expected to take place by February 2025 to increase uptake of the Green Fins standards at national level and report on the findings of the project to motivate participation.
13. The Secretariat will continue to explore opportunities that will support participating countries and the East Asian Seas region in achieving Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through marine protected area, networking, and OECMs. This includes continued engagement with the “Scaling Up Global MPA Capacity to Reach 30 x 30: Cultivating a Systems Approach to Action” and collaboration with the GEF SCS-SAP Project. At WGMCE-2, SwAM provided learning and knowledge sharing on MPA Network Design and Management as they have done in other Regional Seas Programmes.
14. The Secretariat will build on efforts of the UNEP HQ to support Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans (RSCAP) to develop and enhance their strategies, policies, and action plans, to be aligned with relevant KMGBF goals and targets, which is being implemented in close collaboration with the University of Wollongong.

Marine and Coastal Habitat Conservation and Restoration

15. In partnership with the GCRMN and the UNEP HQ, which includes the Global Fund for Coral Reefs (GFCR), the Secretariat is coordinating an anticipated workshop and capacity building on coral reef monitoring protocols and data analysis in the first half of 2025. The workshop will target coral reef practitioners in each of the COBSEA participating countries. The training and later report will support the development of the next report on the Status of Coral Reefs of the World.

16. In relation to closer collaboration with the GEF SCS-SAP Project, the COBSEA will explore potential synergies on the efforts and activities of that project in relation to coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, and coastal wetlands that can benefit COBSEA participating countries.

Other Biodiversity-Related Activities

17. The UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea (DOALOS) has communicated with the Secretariat for possible synergies with the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Treaty. The WGMCE shall keep the BBNJ topic on hold highlighting three factors: needs for further discussion and consideration of the mandate and role of the COBSEA on BBNJ; the interest of the COBSEA countries; and the resourcing needs and potential duplication of efforts.

Activity	Lead Entities and Roles	Funding Source	Biennial Workplan								Remarks
			2025				2026				
			Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	
Working Group on Marine and Coastal Ecosystems											
Explore biodiversity-related capacity building and skills development workshops and training, as needed.	COBSEA	tbc									The Secretariat will regularly communicate to the WGMCE any opportunities that they might want to pursue regarding training, workshops, and capacity building.
Increase linkages with GEF SCS-SAP Project	COBSEA & SCS-SAP Project	GEF									This includes the possible integration of the Regional Working Groups of the SCS-SAP Project, Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building.
Blue Economy											
The Blue Way for Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) in the Seas of East Asia	COBSEA as lead convener & ADB as co-lead and co-financing	GEF (anticipate)									Submission of Project Information Form (PIF) for GEF endorsement. Project Preparation Grant (PPG) stage upon endorsement.
Coral Voyages: Enhancing Inclusive and Responsible Marine Ecotourism for Local Communities and Ecosystem Conservation in the East Asian Seas:	COBSEA as lead convener Republic of Korea Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and KOEM as co-lead Reef World Foundation as technical partner	RoK ODA (anticipated)									If selected, project is expected to start in 2026.
Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning (MCSP)											
Explore opportunities to support on Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning activities including trainings and capacity buildings	COBSEA	tbc									Highlighted as a priority by several participating countries. Potential partnerships SwAM.

Activity	Lead Entities and Roles	Funding Source	Biennial Workplan								Remarks
			2025				2026				
			Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	
Marine Protected Areas (MPA)											
Unlocking sustainable marine tourism businesses using Green Fins as a resource for MPA conservation	COBSEA Reef World to lead technical implementation and Coral Triangle Centre as on the ground partner in Bali	Blue Natural Capital Financing Facility (BNCFF)									National workshop expected in first quarter of 2025.
Explore opportunities focused on Marine Protected Area Networking for the East Asian Seas	COBSEA	tbc									Identified as a priority in the East Asian Seas Action Plan. Potential partnerships SwAM. Current engagement with the initiative “Scaling Up Global MPA Capacity to Reach 30 x 30: Cultivating a Systems Approach to Action”
Explore opportunities on knowledge sharing and learning exchange on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures	COBSEA	tbc									Highlighted as a priority by several participating countries
Marine and Coastal Habitat Conservation and Restoration											
Training on coral reef monitoring protocols, analysis and reporting	COBSEA, Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network, UNEP	UNEP HQ with Global Fund for Coral Reef									Strengthen engagement with the GCRMN through regional coral reef monitoring trainings.
Explore opportunities to support other marine and coastal habitats in the region.	COBSEA	tbc									Stronger engagement with the GEF SCS-SAP Project can facilitate focus on the 4 habitats in the region.

Further information and documentation can be found online at www.cobsea.org

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