



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

Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Coral Reef and Seagrass Beds

Iloilo City, Philippines 11-12 August 2025

Exploring Potential Linkages between SCS SAP sites and the Regional Collaborative Network of Marine Conservation Areas



INTRODUCTION

Building on the discussions during the East Asian Seas Congress (November 2024) held in Xiamen, China, followed-up by the workshops during the 10th Our Ocean Conference in Busan, Korea (April 2025), and later launched during the UN Ocean Conference (June 2025) in Nice, France, regional organizations agreed to work together through a Regional Collaborative Network for MPAs in the East Asian Seas with the view to developing concerted efforts to support country partners achieve their commitments towards the 30x30 targets of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

These regional organizations, which will now be called as ‘the Regional MPA Network’ include, the Arafura and Timor Seas Ecosystem Action Program (ATSEA); ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB); Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA); Coral Triangle Initiative on Coral Reefs, Fisheries, and Food Security (CTI-CFF); Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission - Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (IOC-WESTPAC); International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Asia-Pacific and North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN), and Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and the South China Seas – Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project

Among areas of potential collaboration are: building a common understanding of MPA and MPA Network initiatives in the region through mapping regional initiatives, sharing of existing tools and resources, linking existing knowledge platforms, enhancing communication of good practices and success stories, organizing joint capacity building and training, building country partner networks, elevating the profile of the East Asian Seas globally in a concerted manner, and joint project development and resource mobilization towards regional marine conservation efforts.

SCS-SAP IN THE NETWORK

The SCS-SAP Project aims to establish, increase protection, and improve management of 150,405 ha of mangroves, 14,266 ha of coral reefs, 19,045 ha of seagrass, and 416,859 ha of coastal wetlands. These are facilitated through different means, including MPAs and OECMs, amongst others. To improve and sustain regional protection mechanisms, the networking of these areas, particularly those that are ecologically connected across jurisdictional borders may be explored. Moreover, under Outcome 3.5, the SCS-SAP Project has been leading the Regional MPA Network, providing technical and in-kind support towards its establishment.

To move things forward, the SCS-SAP Project is further supporting the MPA mapping exercise that PEMSEA is coordinating. This mapping exercise will analyze information and knowledge on existing MPA and MPA related initiatives, tools and resources, partnership modalities and practices with key stakeholders that bring mutual benefits, social inclusion and transparency and lessons learned in tackling MPA issues in order to and build a deeper understanding of initiatives to strengthen MPA effectiveness in the EAS region and in support of respective regional strategic action programs or strategies. The target for the exercise includes all practitioners, managers, planners and designers involved in global ocean governance from local to regional scales in the EAS and elsewhere.

The Regional Working Group on Coral Reefs, Mangroves, Seagrass, and Coastal Wetlands of the SCS-SAP are requested to support in the MPA mapping exercise in order to provide a cohesive and up-to-date information on current marine management systems in place (including MPAs and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures/OECMs). This is a substantial process to determine a region-wide understanding of MPA and marine management situation which can later be used to develop a regional project that can move towards the 30x30.