



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

**Third Meeting of the SCS SAP Steering Committee**

7-8 May 2025, Manila, Philippines

## **DRAFT FINAL REPORT OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE SCS SAP PROJECT**





**DRAFT**

**Final Report**

**Mid-Term Review**

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

**GEF ID: 5538**



Peter Whalley

February – March 2025

## Project Identification Table

Table 1 - Project summary

UNEP PIMS ID/SMA ID:	35785 UMOJA 009056	Grant ID:	P1-33GFL-001262/64; S1-32GFL-000631
UNEP Management (Division/Branch/Unit):	Ecosystems Division, Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems Branch		
Implementing Partners:	UNOPS and SEAFDEC (Terminated in December 2022)		
Sources of Funding:	Country (ies): GEF Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	Institution Name/Type: GEF/Multilateral Fund	
Relevant SDG(s):	Goals: 1, 5, 6, 8, 11,12,13,14, 15, 17, 18		
MTS (all that apply):		UNEP approval date:	December 2017
POW Output(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022)	<p>POW Direct Outcome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature: (i) Number of national or subnational entities that, with UNEP support, adopt integrated approaches to address environmental and social issues and/or tools for valuing, monitoring and sustainably managing biodiversity.</li> <li>Nature: (iii) Number of countries and national, regional and subnational authorities and entities that incorporate, with UNEP support, biodiversity and ecosystem-based approaches into development and sectoral plans, policies and processes for the sustainable management</li> </ul>	POW Expected Accomplishment(s) number/reference (applicable for projects approved pre-2022):	POW Expected Accomplishment:

	<p>and/or restoration of terrestrial, freshwater and marine areas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature: (iv) Increase in territory of land- and seascapes that is under improved ecosystem conservation and restoration</li> <li>• Nature: (v) Positive shift in public opinion, attitudes and actions in support of biodiversity and ecosystem approaches</li> <li>• Governance: (ii) Number of international legal agreements or instruments advanced or developed with UNEP support to address emerging or internationally agreed environmental goals</li> <li>• Governance: (iii) Number of plans, approaches, strategies, policies, action plans or budgeting processes of entities at the national, regional and global levels that include environmental goals as a result of UNEP support</li> <li>• Governance: (iv) Number of entities at the national, regional or global levels that UNEP has supported in developing integrated approaches and</li> </ul>		
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	tools for enhanced coordination, cooperation and synergies for the coherent implementation of multilateral environmental agreements		
Sub-programme:	Nature Action	Programme Coordination Project:	
Expected start date:	November 2016	Actual start date:	PCA/LOA operational December 2017 (SEAFDEC) and May 2018 (UNOPS)
Planned completion date:	June 2023 (Original) December 2026	Actual operational completion date:	N/A
Planned total project budget at approval:	Grant: 15,000,000 \$	Actual total expenditures reported as of 15 January 2025	5,734,028 \$ (as per Quarterly Expenditure)
Planned Extra-budgetary Funds:	Co-financing 83,451,948 \$	Secured Extra-budgetary Funds:	Cash: In-kind:
		Actual Extra-budgetary Funds expenditures reported as of [date]:	Co-financing 92,197,483 \$
First disbursement:	January 2018	Planned date of financial closure:	Estimated 1 year after operational completion. June 2027
No. of formal project revisions:	2	Date of last approved project revision:	January 2024
No. of Steering Committee meetings:	2 (PSC 1 was virtual)	Date of Last Steering Committee meeting:	January 2024

Mid-Term Review: Implementing the SAP for the SCS and Gulf of Thailand Project – March 2025

Mid-term Review/ Evaluation ( <i>planned date</i> ):	September 2024	Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):	February - March 2025
Terminal Evaluation ( <i>planned date</i> ):	July 2027	Terminal Evaluation (actual date):	N/A
Coverage – Implementing Country(ies):	Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam	Coverage – Implementing Region(s):	South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
Dates of previous project phases:	February 2002 - December 2008	Status of future project phases:	N/A

## Acknowledgements

This Mid-Term Review has been prepared by an independent consultant, Dr Peter Whalley and the views expressed are his own. The consultant is grateful to all stakeholders that have provided their time to answer questions and to all members of the Project Coordination Unit for facilitating the information collection and interviews required.

The consultant is also very grateful to the communities and authorities in Ban Don Bay region who provide a good oversight of the work being undertaken on the pilot site demonstration and, more importantly, provided an extensive meal based on products from the coastal habitats. He is also grateful for the work and information provided by Ms. Saisunee Jaksuin and the National Coordinator for Thailand, Ms. Suwimol Sereepaowong, who accompanied the consultant on the pilot site visit to Ban Don Bay.

### UNEP Disclaimer:

*This report has been prepared by an external consultant as part of a Mid-Term Review, which is a management-led process to assess performance at the project's mid-point. The UNEP Evaluation Office provides templates and tools to support the review process. The findings and conclusions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of Member States or the UN Environment Programme Senior Management.*

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## Abbreviations

ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEO	Chief Executive Officer [GEF]
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
COVID	Coronavirus
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EA	Executing Agency [SEAFDEC]
FMO	[UNEP] Fund Management Officer
GEF	Global Environment Facility
IOC/WESTPAC	Inter-governmental Oceanography Commission for the Western Pacific
IW	[GEF] International Waters
IW:LEARN	International Waters Learning Exchange & Resources Network
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCU	Project Co-ordination Unit
PIR	Project Implementation Review [annual report]
PMC	Project Management Cost
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RSTC	Regional Scientific and Technical Committee
SAP	Strategic Action Programme
SCS	South China Seas
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
TDA	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
TM	[UNEP] Task Manager
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USD	United States Dollar

## 1 Executive Summary

This Mid-Term Review of the UNEP Implemented GEF Project: *'Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand'*, is consistent with the requirements of the GEF and UNEP. The purpose of this review is to enable the members of the Project Steering Committee, the Project Co-ordination Unit, the Executing Agency (UNOPS), the GEF Agency (UNEP), and local, national and regional partners to assess progress to-date, to identify any corrective actions needed, and to learn lessons for future projects.

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea, which supports a number of unique habitats and ecosystems that are amongst the most biologically diverse shallow water marine ecosystems globally. The countries surrounding the South China Sea have undergone very rapid economic development and rapid population increase in coastal areas over the past two decades resulting in degradation and loss of coastal habitats and resources.

This project builds on the regional Strategic Action Programme endorsed by the countries of the region in 2008, developed by a previous GEF project. The aim of this project is to initiate implementation of the Strategic Action Programme involving pilot action in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam and regional actions to identify a sustainable governance structure to coordinate future necessary interventions.

This Project was endorsed by the GEF Chief Executive Officer in November 2016 and approved by UNEP for implementation in December 2017. The Project has three components and the overall objective *'To assist countries in meeting the targets of the approved Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the marine and coastal environment of the South China Sea (SCS) through implementation of the National Action Plans in support of the SAP, and strengthening regional co-ordination for SCS SAP implementation'*. The project was endorsed with two Executing Agencies: UNOPS with responsibility for the national activities in Component 1 and for the Project Coordination Unit; and, SEAFDEC having responsibility for the regional activities in Components 2 and 3.

### Findings

The project has faced significant delays in execution due to the impacts of COVID 19 restrictions, the loss of SEAFDEC as an Executing Agency and need to recruit three project managers, with the current project manager starting in May 2023. Following the appointment of the current Project Manager and the departure of SEAFDEC, a second PSC held in January 2024 identified, an addition no-cost project extension until December 2026 with UNOPS as the sole Executing Agency.

This review considers that the original project documents, whilst very comprehensive and detailed, suffered from an overly complex structure and Results Framework with 16 outcomes and 64 indicators. As of December 2024, the project spend was approximately 40% of the total grant (with two years remaining until the current end-date). The project has had limited progress in implementing Components 2 and 3. Progress on the pilots in Component 1 has been successful with three countries (Cambodia, China and Thailand). The

Philippines have only recently started the pilot work), but Indonesia and Vietnam have yet to reach agreement with the Executing Agency. The Mid-Term Review has identified that the Project Coordination Unit and the Executing Agency must expedite the remaining outputs as soon as possible and report a clear action plan to the next Project Steering Committee meeting.

In October 2024 the project held a 'Retreat' with national and regional stakeholder that identified critical key 'Deliverables' to achieve the goals of this project encompassing the endorsed outcomes. The Retreat further identified that the UNEP Regional Seas body COBSEA was a potential candidate to provide long-term sustainable coordination of the Strategic Action Programme implementation. The Mid-Term Review considers that this path provides an effective exit strategy for the project with a means to sustain the GEF investment. However, this requires that the key Deliverables identified are completed, in particular, the actions on sustainable financing and grant mechanism in Component 3.

The project is failing to provide stakeholders with an up-to-date and effective communication on project activities. The lack of a communications strategy and a Project communication specialist has been a recurring issue that has also led to poor awareness and misunderstandings from the start of the project with national stakeholders.

**Component 1:** Three pilot countries (Cambodia, China and Thailand) are progressing well with a total of 36 pilot interventions on habitats. All three countries have reported that the national activities associated with Component 1 will be concluded by the current project end-date (December 2026). The Philippines have recently signed an agreement and work has commenced, with inception meetings reported to be held in March 2025. The MTR considers that the Philippines may require a maximum 1 year no-cost extension (to December 2027) to complete the work. A discussion at the next Project Steering Committee meeting should be initiated by the Project Coordination Unit with regards to agreeing options on pilots in Indonesia and Vietnam given the lack of remaining time for effective completion of these activities.

**Component 2:** There is a lack of progress indicated by comparing output progress between the 2024 Project Implementation Report and the December 2004 quarterly report which is concerning. However, the recent contracting of Strategic Action Programme regional and national development teams with a clear plan of action suggests that this key Deliverable will be submitted for approval by a COBSEA's meeting in October 2026.

**Component 3:** The lack of demonstrable progress and focus on the crucial mechanisms to be developed to finance the sustainable coordination of the Strategic Action Programme implementation is of significant concern. This must receive high priority and attention from the Project Coordination Unit and the Executing Agency. The development of a Small Grants mechanism is also urgently required, with the significant allocated project resources yet to be committed. Consultants or organisations need to be contracted for Component 3 activities as soon as possible and certainly by the mid-2025.

The Mid-Term Review is recommending that the next Project Steering Committee meeting considers the benefits of a 3<sup>rd</sup> no-cost project extension to enable the completion of delayed outputs (predominately in components 2 and 3). This delay also offers an opportunity to

effectively hand-over the results and mechanisms developed to the COBSEA secretary as part of the project's exit strategy. The project extension would not necessitate a fully staffed Project Coordination Unit and considerations should be given to potential benefits of co-locating the reduced project management within the COBSEA's offices (subject to available space).

In summary, despite significantly delays and late delivery of outputs/outcomes, the conclusion of the Project Retreat indicates that the project could deliver the main outcomes expected, subject to specific outputs receiving a further one year no-cost extension. **However**, it is essential that the Project Coordination Unit provides a proactive approach to the overall management and delivery of all planned project outputs, supported by a detailed workplan. This will require strong overall direction from the Project Manager and the Executing Agency. Successful completion of the project's activities is a prerequisite to the phased transfer of the results and tools to COBSEA as the potential long-term body responsible for the coordination of the SAP.

## Lessons

1. **Importance of communication strategy and specialist to ensure good awareness and understanding of the whole project:** The Project Inception Report identified that a communication strategy and an officer would be required but this has been very delayed. Communication specialist/officer should be recruited at the start of the project (certainly within the inception phase).
2. **Benefit of National Coordinators as part of the Project Coordination team to ensure good interactions at all levels with country representatives:** Regional projects should encourage the use of National Coordinators to both facilitate the project actions but also to assist with providing information from relevant national meetings/activities that could be of benefit to other countries in the region.
3. **Multiple Executing Agencies:** The project was designed with two Executing Agencies, with one of the agencies being responsible for the Project Management Unit. It is common for GEF projects to have multiple agencies providing their complementary comparative advantages to the project. In designing projects, carefully consideration should be provided that all executing agencies are represented within the Project Management Unit and the project management budget is appropriately split between agencies.

## Recommendations

1. **Development /update of Communication Strategy:** There is a significant need to provide good communications of the *whole* project's activities to the regional partners especially to reflect the conclusions of the recent Project Retreat and the focus on key Deliverables.
2. **Small Grant Programme:** The review suggests that a small grants programme could be launched quickly using available approaches and building on the current habitats' pilots (and national suggestions to aid Strategic Action Programme implementation) in the countries to support further awareness raising and socio-economic activities linked to the pilots.
3. **Difficulties experienced by the Executing Agency in obtaining agreements signed in Indonesia and Vietnam for project activities requires a deadline for a decision.** Even

with a further 1-year project extension (to December 2027) the remaining time to achieve beneficial results for countries and to contribute to regional Strategic Action Programme implementation lessons for the region is very limited. The Project Management Unit should present recommendations to the Project Steering Committee meeting on possible deadline for a decision by Indonesia /Vietnam (e.g. August 2025).

4. **Formal PSC decision on the project recommending COBSEA as an appropriate body to coordinate the long-term Strategic Action Programme implementation:** The Project Coordination Unit to provide necessary supporting material on Strategic Action Programme coordination and the role of COBSEA. To be presented and discussed at the next Project Steering Committee meeting in May 2025.
5. **Project extension/phasing out of the project:** An additional one- year no-cost extension is proposed until December 2027. This should be supported by a detailed PCU/Implementing Agency developed workplan with clear milestones and presented to the May 2025 Project Steering Committee for approval. This extension offers an opportunity to assist with the hand-over of information /outputs to COBSEA in a phased exit of the project from the region.
6. **Updating Project Results Framework indicators/targets:** The Project Coordination Unit should review/update the Results Framework to ensure it represents accurately the current project activities. It would also be an opportunity to include gender indicators and to consider how the information can be reported more effectively in the annual Project Implementation Reports.
7. **UNEP to request GEF to correct website:** To rectify the old information (project documents) on the GEF website
8. **Senior PCU staff should endeavour to visit at least one pilot in each country**

### Summary of Project Ratings

Criterion	Rating
<b>A. Strategic Relevance</b>	S
1. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) strategic priorities	HS
2. Complementarity/Coherence with relevant existing interventions	S
<b>B. Quality &amp; Revision of Project Design</b>	S
<b>C. Effectiveness</b>	MS
1. Theory of change	
2. Availability of outputs	MU-S
3. Progress towards project outcomes, including towards indicators	MU-S
4. Likelihood of impact, includes innovativeness and replication and scalability	L
5. Adaptive management	S
<b>D. Financial Management</b>	S
1. Adherence to UNEP's/Donor policies and procedures	S
2. Completeness of project financial information	S
<b>E. Efficiency</b>	MU - S
<b>F. Monitoring and Reporting</b>	S
1. Monitoring of project implementation	S
2. Project reporting	
<b>G. Exit Strategy &amp; Sustainability</b>	L

Criterion	Rating
<b>H. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues</b>	
1. Project Inception	S
2. Quality of project management and supervision	S
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	S
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	S
3. Stakeholders participation and cooperation	S
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	MS
5. Environmental and social safeguards	MS
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	S
7. Communication and public awareness	MS
<b>Overall Project Rating</b>	<b>MU - MS</b>

Table 2 -Project Performance Ratings Table

## 2 Project Overview

### 2.1 Background

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the UNEP/GEF Project: *'Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand'* (SCS<sup>1</sup>-SAP project), is consistent with the requirements of the GEF and UNEP. The purpose of this MTR is to enable the members of the Project Steering Committee, the Project Co-ordination Unit (PCU), the Executing Agency (UNOPS), the GEF Agency (UNEP), and local, national and regional partners to assess progress to-date, to identify any corrective actions needed, and to learn lessons for future projects.

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea, which supports a number of unique habitats and ecosystems that are amongst the most biologically diverse shallow water marine ecosystems globally. The countries surrounding the South China Sea have undergone very rapid economic development and rapid population increase in coastal areas over the past two decades resulting in degradation and loss of coastal habitats and resources. Recognising that actions were urgently needed to halt degradation of the environment of this marine basin, the countries of the region sought and received the assistance (2003-2008) of UNEP and the GEF in preparing a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) of the issues, problems and their root causes as the basis for development of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP). The SAP acknowledged the high pressure from fishing on the fish stock and related coastal ecosystems resulting in their services declining impacting socio-economic condition.

### 2.2 Institutional Context

#### 2.2.1 Executing arrangements

This GEF project is implemented by UNEP (as the GEF Agency) and was designed with two Executing Agencies (EAs): UNOPS and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC). Figure 1 (below) indicate the anticipated responsibilities and activities of each EA. Figure 2 provides an overview of the overall management and governance arrangements at the project, regional and national levels. SEAFDEC later withdrew from the EA role (December 2022) and their responsibilities were taken over by UNOPS (Section 2.3).

The Project Coordination Unit (PCU) was initially housed within SEAFDEC's office on Kasetsart University in Bangkok. After SEAFDEC's withdrawal from the project the PCU used temporary space with UNOPS' office within UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). Currently the PCU is also establishing an office within Kasetsart University Faculty of Fisheries.

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<sup>1</sup> For this report, the use of SCS includes the Gulf of Thailand consistent with the title of the project.

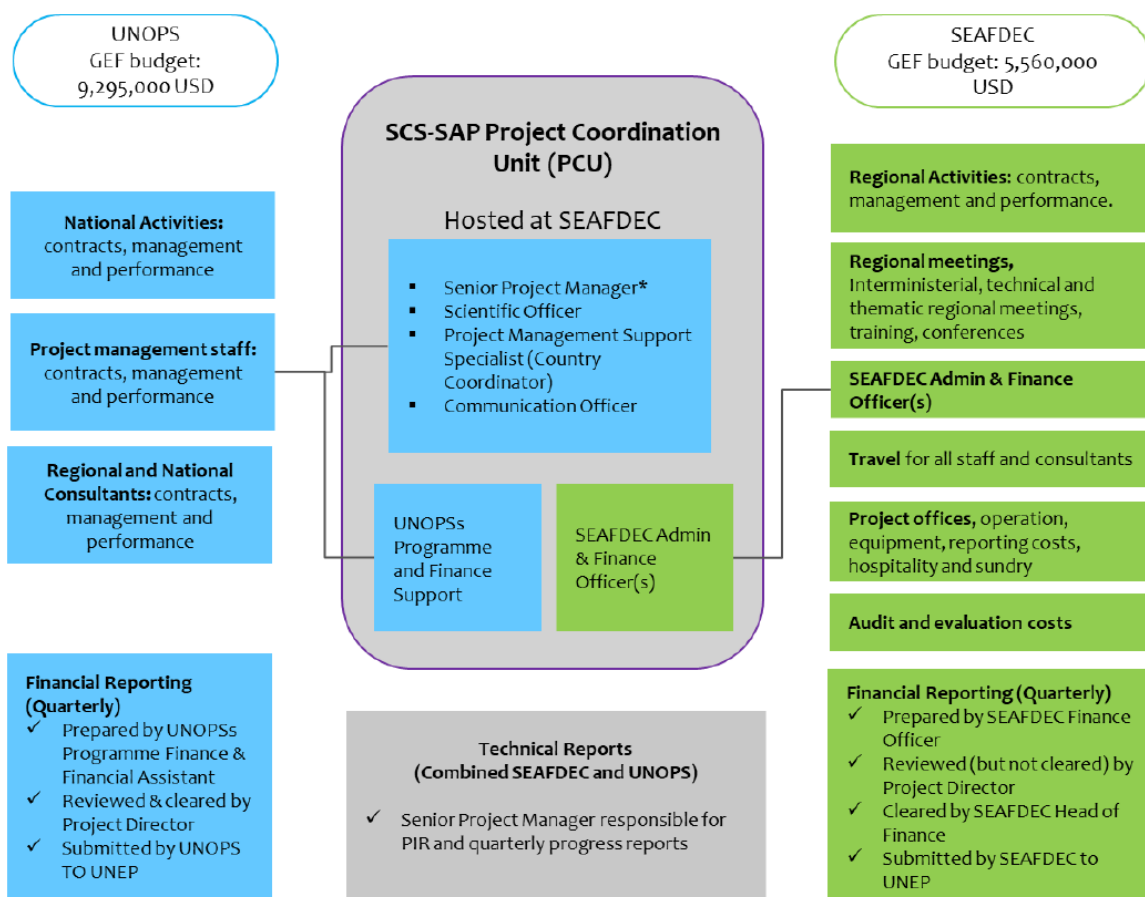


Figure 1 -Project Execution arrangements (as presented in project Inception Report)

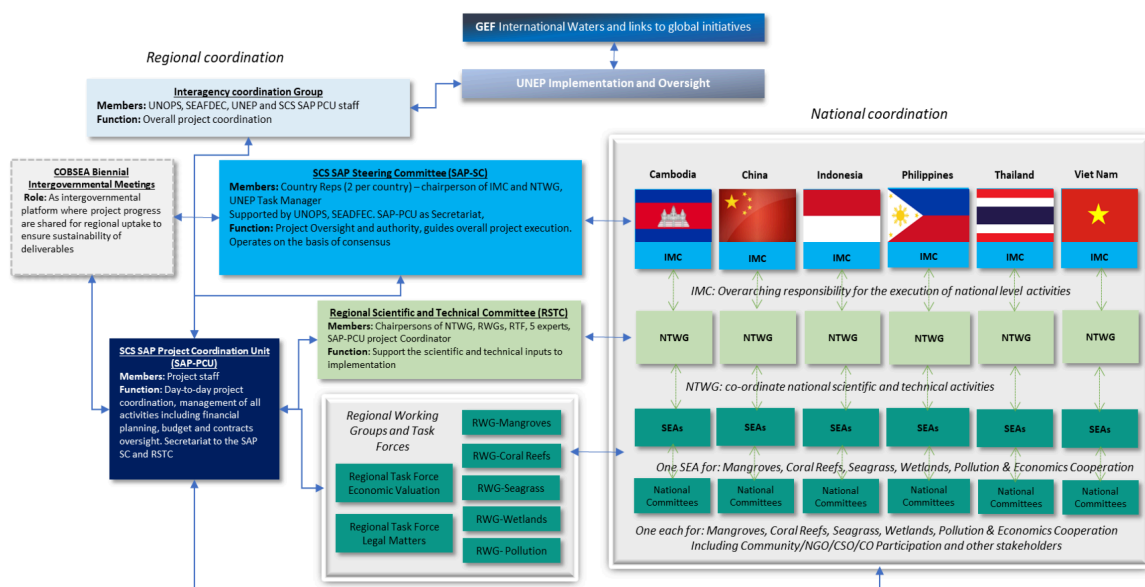


Figure 2- Organisation and decision making arrangements (as presented in Project Inception Report)

## 2.3 The Project

The overall goals of the Project (as presented in the UNEP Project Document) are:

- to maintain an environment at the regional level, in which collaboration and partnership in addressing environmental problems of the South China Sea, between all stakeholders, and at all levels is fostered and encouraged;
- to enhance the capacity of the participating governments to integrate environmental considerations into national development planning;
- to strengthen and expand the network of scientists, government officials and civil society established under the UNEP/GEF SCS Project.

The medium-term objective of the projects was to '*Assist countries in meeting the targets of the approved Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the marine and coastal environment of the South China Sea (SCS) through implementation of the National Action Plans in support of the SAP, and strengthening regional co-ordination for SCS- SAP implementation*'. The CEO endorsement request qualified this objective with a footnote stating: '*It is noted that, activities undertaken during SAP formulation and those to be implemented by the present project have and will not address issues in areas of jurisdictional dispute. Indeed activities of the coral reef component are restricted to coastal, or non-oceanic coral reefs (as defined by Charles Darwin), and do not intend to blur the distinction between resolving jurisdictional matters and those aimed at meeting immediate, and perhaps dire, issues relating to the conservation of globally significant biological diversity embedded in the SAP targets*'.

The endorsed GEF CEO document for the project is based around three components with 16 outcomes and 64 'outputs' (also identified in the Project Results Framework as indicators) that are reported in the Project Implementation Progress (PIR) reports. A Theory of Change (ToC) was not required or prepared for the CEO Endorsement Document.

The Project Inception report presented an agreed problem tree and developed a complex ToC (presented in Annex 5) with the 16 agreed outcomes. A simplified reconstructed ToC was developed during the MTR Inception phase and has been refined in discussions with the PCU. This is discussed in Section 4.).

The three main components are:

- **Component 1: Reducing habitat degradation and loss via national and local reforms to achieve Strategic Action Programme targets for coastal habitat management in the South China Sea.** This focuses on enhancing local and national policies and reforms where required to improve coastal ecosystem status and services that supports the overall objective of the SAP goals through the implementation of National Action Plans. These policy strengthening actions are supported with local pilot projects that are expected to deliver lessons that will assist all countries.
- **Component 2: Strengthening knowledge-based action planning for the management of coastal habitats and land-based pollution to reduce environmental degradation of the South China Sea** This focusses on improving and strengthening a range of knowledge, management tools and planning plans, This includes the updating the TDA and revising the SAP to take account of new information and emerging issues

affecting the coastal environment since the previous Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and SAP was endorsed.

- **Component 3: Facilitating regional and national level integration and cooperation for implementation of the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme.** This has been designed to aid the delivery of potential regional mechanisms to manage the long-term implementation of the SAP through existing regional bodies and strengthening wide stakeholder involvement through a range of small grant initiatives. This will involve the identification of sustainable financing options to assure the success of the SAP implementation.

The Project involves six countries: China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The CEO Endorsement document was submitted in October 2016 and endorsed in November 2016 with a 15,000,000 USD grant that was supported by country and regional bodies with co-financing totalling 83,451,948 USD. The planned duration of this project was 5 years.

The SCS-SAP project was endorsed by the GEF with UNEP as the GEF Implementing Agency and SEAFDEC and UNOPS as Executing Agencies. The designed project was consistent with UNEP's 2016 Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) and Programme of Work (PoW), with a focus on Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, and remains consistent with the current MTS/PoW on Nature Actions.

Project Cooperation Agreements between UNEP and the executing Agencies were concluded in 2017/2018 (Project Cooperation Agreement – PCA – with SEAFDEC and Letter of Agreement – LOA – with UNOPS) . A Project Inception Phase and subsequent meeting was undertaken in 2020 – 2021 and the first Project Steering Committee meeting held in June 2021, where a no-cost project extension was agreed. SEAFDEC withdrew from the execution role and their responsibility was terminated in December 2022. The second Project Steering Committee meeting was held in January 2024 where a further no-cost extension was recommended and approved by UNEP resulting in a projected completion date of December 2026. All execution functions, subsequent to the 2024 PSC, meeting are undertaken by UNOPS.

In addition to minor budget changes (recommended during the project Inception phase and during subsequent PSC meetings) the project suffered the withdrawal of SEAFDEC as an EA. This necessitated a change to the agreement between UNEP and UNOPS to enable the latter to execute the whole project. In addition to this change, two project no-cost extension have been approved by the Project Steering Committee (PSC); the second change (January 2024 PSC) was for the project to be completed by December 2026. Currently undergoing internal redefinition based on project 'Retreat' (held in October 2024) and will eventually be aligned to 5 'Deliverables' that encompass the GEF CEO endorsed outcomes. Whilst this may not *per se* result in a formal change it will provide a clearer statement of intent to ensure the full extent of the project will be better understood by countries/regional stakeholders.

### 2.3.1 Project Stakeholders

The project benefits from an extensive networks of local, national and regional stakeholders built up during the first GEF project in the South China Sea (culminating in the 2008 endorsed

SAP). This project has developed an extensive system of governance and technical guidance bodies as indicated in Figure 2. The Project website indicates a number of supervisory and other groups including:

- Project Steering Group (PSC)
- Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC)
- Regional Working Groups (RWG)
- National Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC)
- National Technical Working Group (NTWG)
- National Executing Agencies (SEA) and National Focal Points (NFP)
- National Committee

The project has an appropriate mix of government bodies, regional organisations, local authorities, NGOs/CSOs and academia which are detailed in the Project Document. The project design was not required to have detailed gender strategies or plans nor a robust analysis on marginalised people at CEO Endorsement.

### 2.3.2 External Challenges

The Project has faced several challenges that have resulted in the significant delays in project execution. These include:

- COVID 19 and all the difficulties resulting in reducing travel and face-to-face meetings, consultations and site validations.
- Withdrawal of SEAFDEC as an Executing Agency and organising UNOPS to undertake the full-project execution.
- Delays due to national government restructuring and organising that has slowed the agreements between UNOPS and Indonesia, Vietnam and Philippines.
- The EA (UNOPS) has had to recruit three Project Managers (the current PM was appointed in May 2023) and there was a significant gap of over a year between the second (remotely based) and the appointment of the third project manager when progress effectively stalled.

### 2.3.3 Project Budget

The table below presents the component GEF grant and co-financing contribution abstracted from the CEO Endorsement Document provided on the GEF website.

<b>Project Component</b>	<b>Indicative Grant Amount (\$)</b>	<b>Indicative Co Financing (\$)</b>
1. Reducing habitat and degradation and loss via national and local reforms to achieve Strategic Action Programme Targets for coastal habitat management in the South China Sea	7,250,000	44,366,892
2. Strengthening knowledge-based action planning for the management of coastal habitats and land-based pollution to reduce environmental degradation of the South China Sea	3,530,000	17,012,528

3. Facilitating regional and national level integration and cooperation for implementation of the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme	3,500,000	19,272,528
Project Management Cost (PMC)	720,000	2,800,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>15,000,000</b>	<b>83,451,948</b>

Table 3 – Budget per component (GEF CEO Endorsement Document (not final) - GEFweb)

### 3 Review Methods

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for this Mid-Term Review laid out clear elements to be completed by the reviewer. This is included in Annex 1.

#### 3.1.1 Evaluation Objective and scope

The **objective of this MTR is** to assess the core criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability* of the project’s development and implementation and will seek views from a wide range of national and regional stakeholders. The **MTR’s scope** has involved the project’s GEF Implementing Agency (UNEP) and Executing Agency (UNOPS and their Project Coordination Unit - PCU) and addresses the design, implementation and management of the project. It will evaluate the efficiency of project management, including the delivery of outputs and activities in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-efficiency. **The purpose of the MTR** is to highlight the achievements of project results and identify any remedial actions that will be necessary to ensure that the project achieves its planned outcomes by completion.

#### Box 1 Key Evaluation Criteria

- **Relevance** – the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organisational policies, including changes over time, as well as the extent to which the project is in line with the GEF Operational Programmes or the strategic priorities under which the project was funded.
- **Effectiveness** – the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
- **Efficiency** – the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
- **Sustainability** – the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.

#### 3.1.2 Methodology

##### Information gathering

The MTR information was gathered using:

- **Desk reviews** – including background documents (GEF CEO Endorsement Document, UNEP Project Documents, Project Inception Reports), progress reports (project

website, PIRs, Project Steering Committee (PSC) minutes, technical project reports), etc. The Documents required were requested from the PCU and those consulted as part of this MTR are listed in Annex 2.

- An **evaluation matrix** was presented in the Consultant's MTR Inception Report to serve as a template for addressing the key criteria for this MTR as presented in the ToR (Annex 3). This matrix guided the desk review of available documents and the interviews with stakeholders.
- **Identification of stakeholders to participate in emailed questionnaire and remote interviews.** The PCU was guided by the consultant on potential stakeholder groups to be contacted. A long list of stakeholders were approached to provide responses to a short questionnaire (Annex 4). These included Project Steering Committee members, Regional advisory body members, representatives of regional LME bodies (e.g. COBSERA, PEMSEA), consultants working on the project etc. and UNEP, EA, the PCU and other relevant GEF projects in the region.
- **Mission to the SCS region:** A detailed 2-week programme was assembled by the PCU. The mission was to Thailand to meet the PCU in Bangkok and to discuss the project with national stakeholders. A field visit was organised to a typical pilot activity in Thailand (Ban Don Bay) to meet local representatives from the executing partner responsible for the pilot actions and to meet local community representatives who are assisting and benefiting from products of the target habitats. Details of the mission and stakeholders involved in this review are presented in Annex 4.
- **Analysis and review preparation:** A reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) was presented in the Inception Report and has been further refined in discussion with the PCU. The progress and achievements of the project's outputs and outcomes (presented in quarterly reports and PIRs) have been reviewed (Annex 6 and Section 5.3.3).

**Cross-cutting issues:** The evaluation also examined aspects of awareness raising, capacity development, civil society engagement (including gender issues) within the frame of the project's objective.).

### 3.2 Limitations

The only significant limitation was that the MTR only was able to travel to a single country and to visit one pilot demonstration site from an extensive range of pilots being implemented across the project.

## 4 Theory of Change (2 pages plus figure)

As indicated above, neither the UNEP Project Document nor the GEF CEO Endorsement Document presented a ToC (this GEF V project predates the necessity). However, a ToC was prepared during the Inception Phase based on the Project Results Framework (this is presented in Annex 5). The MTR Inception report prepared a simplified ToC and this was discussed with the PCU during the mission. This ToC was closely aligned with recent developments to refocus the project on Key Deliverables that encompassed the overall project.

The Project held a 'retreat' with a professional facilitator and about 20 project staff/stakeholders following a meeting in Cambodia in October 2024 to identify potential

means to deliver the project in the remaining time. This workshop identified the following main issues:

- **Knowledge Management Platform – SEA:LEARN<sup>2</sup>** (Including results from all project activities)
- **Integrated TDA SAP Process – SEA:STARS<sup>3</sup>** (The updating of the TDA/SAP in Component 2)
- **Grants Mechanism – SEA:PUFFER<sup>4</sup>** (Activities in Component 3 on small grants and financing mechanisms to support long-term sustainability of the SAP)
- **Pilot activities to implement SAP** approaches to habitats (Component 1)

Together these ‘deliverables’ provide information, experiences and mechanisms to assist the long-term coordination and sustainability of the SAP via a regional agreed organisation (tentatively presented as COBSEA).

This restructuring did not change the expected Project Outcomes (required for reporting to the GEF) but simplified the representation of the project in the main elements that will also be a significant benefit to presenting the project to the countries. (See Section 5.8.7). The MTR has slightly expanded figure presenting the conclusion of the Project Retreat is presented in Figure 3 below.

Based on the MTR’s Inception Report, a finalised reconstructed ToC utilising the key Deliverables is presented in Figure 4.

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<sup>2</sup> Seas of East Asia: Learning Exchange and Resource Network

<sup>3</sup> Seas of East Asia Strategic Actions for Resilient Sustainability

<sup>4</sup> Seas of East Asia Partnership United towards a Financing Facility for Environmental Restoration and Conservation

Figure 3 - Main Project Deliverables (output from October 2024 'Retreat')

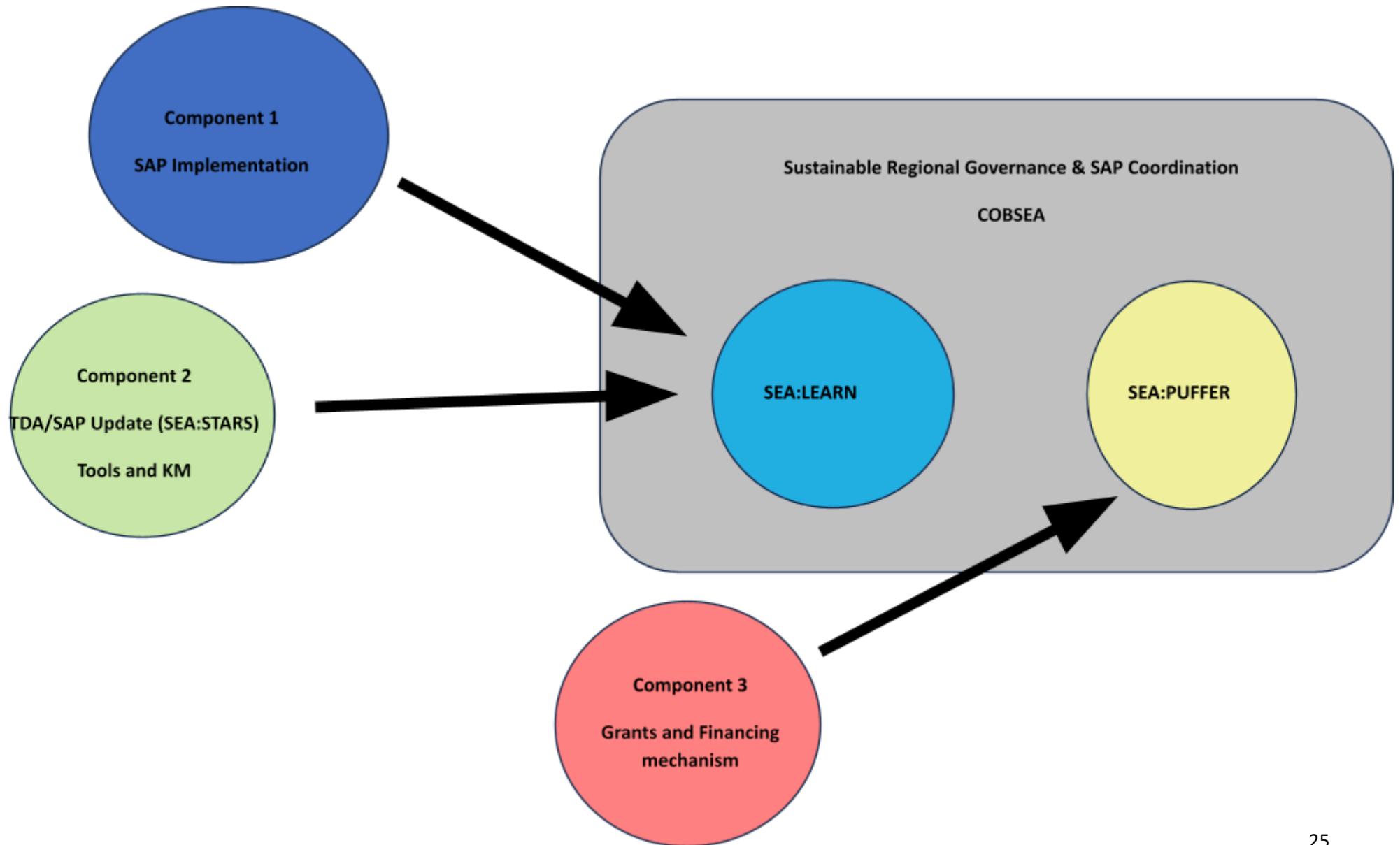
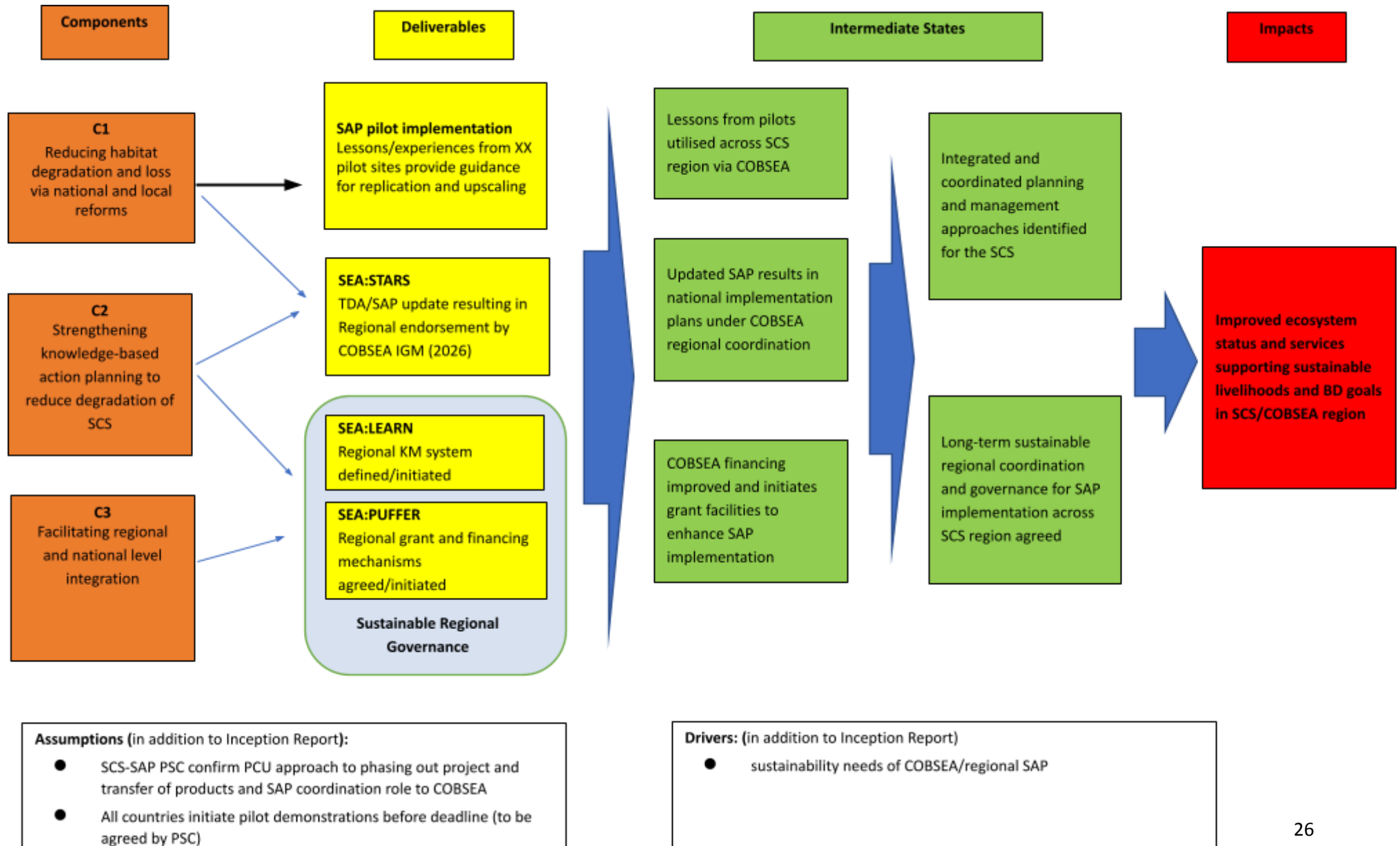


Figure 4 – MTR Reconstructed Theory of Change



## 5 Review Findings

It is clear that for multiple reasons this project has had a slow start to implementation. Whilst understanding the reasons for the slow initiation will be important, identifying potential steps to accelerate delivery to achieve the revised end-date will be a priority.

This project was endorsed by the GEF CEO with a 5-year work programme in 2016. The project was operational in 2018, however the multiple issues that impacted this project resulted in significant delays. This MTR, by necessity rates the *past* performance of this very delayed project, but through a request of the UNEP Task Manager, provides an assessment of both the way forward and the likelihood that the project will deliver the expected goals of the project.

The MTR noted that the information on the GEF website is not correct and key documents are missing. The project title does not include the 'Gulf of Thailand' and the CEO Endorsement Document and UNEP Project Documents are not the final endorsed versions. The GEF final review sheet (at CEO endorsement) is also missing.

### 5.1 A. Strategic Relevance

#### 5.1.1 Alignment to UNEP's Donor and Country Priorities

The project builds on over 40 years of regional cooperation since an East Asian Action Plan was developed under the guidance of the UNEP regional seas programme. Although there is no convention in this region, the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) is a regional intergovernmental mechanism that is guided by the COBSEA strategic Directions (2018 -2022, and 2023 – 2027) within the UNEP Regional Seas programme.

The project design is consistent with the Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, Subprogramme 3 of Programme of Work (PoW 2020-2021 and earlier), and with the UNEP Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) covering the project's execution, through a focus on coastal fisheries and sustainable livelihoods. The project remains consistent with the MTS 2018 -2021 (Healthy and Productive Ecosystems) and MTS 2022 2025 (Nature Action) and consistent with the current PoW.

In addition, the project is consistent with relevant UNEA Resolutions (presented in the Project Inception Report), including:

- UNEA 1 (2014) resolutions 1/5 Chemical and waste; 1/6 Marine plastic debris and microplastics; and 1/8 Ecosystem-based adaptation;
- UNEA 2 (2016) "Strengthening the science-policy interface" resolutions 2/8 Sustainable consumption and production; 2/10 Oceans and seas; and 2/12 Sustainable coral reefs management
- UNEA 3 (2017) "Towards a Pollution-Free Planet" resolution 3/10 Addressing water pollution to protect and restore water-related ecosystems;
- UNEA 4 (2019) "Innovative Solutions for Environmental Challenges and Sustainable Consumption and Production" resolutions: 4/4 Addressing environmental challenges through sustainable business practices; 4/11 Protection of the marine environment from land-based activities; 4/12 Sustainable Management for Global Health of Mangrove; 4/13 Sustainable coral reefs management;

The project was endorsed under, and responds to the GEF V International Waters Strategic Objectives 2 (*Catalyze multi-state cooperation to rebuild marine fisheries and reduce pollution of coasts and Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) while considering climatic variability and*

change) with the expected focal area Outcome 2.1 (*Implementation of agreed Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs) incorporates ecosystem-based approaches to management of LMEs, ICM principles, and policy/legal/ institutional reforms into national/local plans*) Outcome 2.3 (*Innovative solutions implemented for reduced pollution, rebuilding or protecting fish stocks with rights-based management, ICM, habitat (blue forest) restoration/conservation, and port management and produce measurable results*).

The project contributes to the countries efforts to deliver the SDGs (identified in the Project Inception Report) including:

- **Goal 1:** End Poverty in all forms everywhere ((target 1.5)
- **Goal 5:** Gender Equality (Target. 5.a and 4.b)
- **Goal 6:** Clean water and Sanitation (Target 6.3 and 6.6)
- **Goal 8:** Decent work (Target. 8.3, 8.4 and 8.9)
- **Goal 11:** Sustainable Cities and Communities (target. 11.6 and 11.a)
- **Goal 12:** Responsible Consumption and Production (target 12.2 and 12.a and 12.8)
- **Goal 13:** Climate Action (Target 13.1 and 13.2)
- **Goal 14:** Life below Water (targets 14.1, 14.a14.2, 14.4 and 14.5)
- **Goal 15:** Life on Land (targets 15.1, 15.5, 15.9, 15.a)
- **Goal 17:** Partnerships for the Goals (Target 17.6 and 17.17)

The project is aligned to the countries' CBD 2030 targets including reducing threats to biodiversity and tools and solutions for implementing and mainstreaming.

The MTR rates **Alignment to UNEP's Donor and Country Priorities** as **Highly Satisfactory**

### 5.1.2 Complementarity / Coherence with Relevant Existing Interventions

In addition to the project's close relationship with COBSEA, there is complementarity with other regional and global initiatives on Large Marine Ecosystems including: PEMSEA, IOC-WESTPAC, GEF/FAO Bay of Bengal, ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Working Group on Coastal and Marine Environment, etc.

The MTR rates **Complementarity/Coherence with Relevant Existing Interventions** as **Satisfactory**

## 5.2 B. Quality and Revision of Project Design

The project was developed in response to the endorsed 2008 South China Sea SAP that recommended measure to safeguard the coastal habitats to support biodiversity and local community livelihoods.

The Project Document is very detailed and clearly written. However, this did not include a gender strategy nor a ToC description as these were not required at submission.

The overall design of the project is very complex with 16 outcomes and 64 outputs/indicators which are reported on in the PIR. This number of outcomes and output/indicators places a significant burden on the PCU in reporting and renders the resulting reports (e.g. PIRs), almost overwhelming with repetitive details. The design also foresaw a significant number of working groups and committees at the national and regional level, which again puts a considerable demand on the countries to deliver these.

The Project Inception report (June 2021) developed a comprehensive ToC based on the project design and made minor changes to some wording of outputs to for clarity and to correct indicators/targets attributed to an earlier design of the project that include Malaysia. The Inception Phase identified the need for National Coordinators in each country to facilitate the work of the multiple expected pilots in each country. The responsibilities of the National Coordinators have since been expanded to include all project components. The MTR considers this a significantly beneficial modification to the original design.

The project was designed with two Executing Agencies: SEAFDEC with responsible for the regional project components (2 and 3); and, UNOPS having responsibility for the national activities in Component 1 and the staffing of the PCU. When SEAFDEC withdrew from the role of EA (December 2022) there was a significant delay until the project whilst a revised LoA was agreed with UNOPS to execute the whole project. This initial split of executing responsibilities contributed to poor communication of the complete project with the countries, leading to a perception that the 'project' was the activities in Component 1. The current PCU has worked to strengthen the understanding of the project (all three components) with the countries and stakeholders.

The Project 'Retreat' (October 2024) recast the project in simpler more understandable 'Deliverables' (see Section 4) that will be a significant aid to the finalisation of this integrated project.

### **Project Revisions**

- Revision 1: 1.5 year extension approved by PSC (2021) to December 2024 with Minor revisions of outputs to consolidate and reflect national and regional initiatives and new projects and best practices
- Revision 2: Extension approved by PSC (2024) to December 2026

The MTR rates **Quality and Revision of Project Design** as **Satisfactory – Moderately Satisfactory** (due to number of outcomes/indicators)

### **5.3 C Effectiveness**

Apart from comments on the delays to the project, stakeholders were broadly supportive of the effectiveness of the Project, offering the following comments:

- *The Project effectively engaged national stakeholders, local government, universities, community groups etc. and successfully integrated scientific research, policy reforms and community participation, aligning with national environmental strategies.*
- *For international/regional coordination the involvement in the SAP framework supports commitments to global environmental goals, including SDGs, CBD, etc.*
- *The project has effectively engaged local communities and built capacity by training stakeholders in coastal resources management.*
- *The project has established comprehensive management plans for mangroves, coral reefs, seagrasses and wetlands supporting national policies and legislation.*
- *The project has empowered local communities and private sector through training on marine protected areas (MPAs), sustainable tourism, and fisheries management.*

Overall, the MTR rates **Effectiveness** as **Satisfactory**

### 5.3.1 Theory of Change

As explained above (Section 4) the original Project Document/CEO Endorsement Document did not provide a ToC. The Inception phase prepared a detailed ToC to support the execution and understanding of this project. The MTR Inception Report developed an outline and very simple reconstructed ToC based on the main direction of the project. This has been refined in discussion with the PCU and incorporates the key project Deliverables identified in the Project Retreat (October 2024). The MTR reconstructed ToC is presented above. The drivers and assumptions identified in the Inception Report are considered to be still valid.

The MTR recommends that when the project has developed a gender strategy (see section 5.8.4) then this ToC (and the Project Results Framework) should be revisited to identify how they can be updated to incorporate potential beneficial impacts on gender issues.

### 5.3.2 Availability of Outputs

As mentioned in this MTR report multiple times, the Project has incurred several significant issues that have caused considerable delay to the project execution. This is most clearly seen in the differing progress between Component 1 and Components 2 & 3. Even within Component 1, only three countries (Cambodia, China and Thailand) signed their respective PCAs with UNOPS to initiate the pilot activities on habitat specific sites. The Philippines has recently (November 2024) signed a Grant Support Agreement (GSA) between an NGO and UNOPS and work is just beginning. Currently does not appear to be short-term prospect of agreements being signed with Indonesia or Vietnam due to difficulties encountered with national authorities' requirement for an MoU in Indonesia and restructuring of government ministries in Vietnam.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Implementation status (Based on average of all outputs per component) (2024 PIR) %</b>	<b>Implementation status (Based on average of all outputs per component) (Q4 report, December 2024) %</b>	<b>PIR rating (MTR estimated average based on all outputs in component)</b>
1	55	59	S
2	15	18	MU-MS
3	11	12	MU-MS

Table 4 - Overview of progress of outputs in Project Components

Table 3 shows a relatively small progression in the implementation status between June 2024 (PIR) and the quarterly report delivered to UNEP in December 2024.

Full details of output status as reported in the 2024 PIR (with project ratings) and estimated by the PCU from December 2024 quarterly reports is summarised in Annex 6.

## Component 1 – Reducing habitat degradation and loss via national and local reforms to achieve Strategic Action Programme targets for coastal habitat management in the South China Sea

The main activities in Component 1 are centred around the national actions to strengthen policies and regulations, and undertake pilot actions to support critical habitats relevant to coastal environment. The key focus is directed at multiple pilot activities involving local authorities and communities to support the management and protection (including replanting) of these habitats. Over 50 pilot actions are expected in this project.

Pilot country	Pilot Sites	MTR's assessment of progress
Cambodia	12	Likely to be completed by December 2026
China	13	Likely to be completed by December 2026
Indonesia	11	The EA has been trying to get agreement signed but the requirement for a MoU with the government has delayed progress. The PSC should discuss a cut-off date beyond which this activity cannot be realistically completed and the resources reassigned.
Philippines	7	Work commenced. National steering meeting to be held in March 2025. The MTR considers that whilst this is likely to progress well this pilot will require an extension to finalise the work and ensure the results are captured /distributed across SCS region
Thailand	11	Thai authorities expect all on-site work to be completed by June 2025 (reporting will follow)
Vietnam	10	National restructuring of responsible ministries has continued to delay the signing of the national PCA with UNOPS. The PSC should discuss a cut-off date beyond which this activity cannot be realistically completed and the resources reassigned

Table 5 - Current (and planned) pilot sites (including Mangrove, Coral Reefs, Seagrasses and Wetlands)

The MTR visited a site in Thailand (Ban Don Bay) to see the progression of the work and the level of support from the local authorities and communities. The local community visited in the mission was happy to be involved in supporting key habitats that provide fish, shellfish and plant materials for consumption and sale in local markets. This pilot site was considered to be 'typical' of the sites in Thailand in terms of progress. The PCU reported that work in China and Cambodia were also progressing well and this was confirmed by representatives of these two countries attending the First Asian Regional Dialogue on Seagrasses and Dugong Conservation workshop in Bangkok.

The local authority (DMCR No. 4) provided a good overview of the technical work undertaken and plans to sustain these actions through private sector, community and tourist fees, including with volunteer actions. On the success of these pilot activities and the support of local communities, the MTR consultant will be recommending that the project targets their proposed Small Grants Programme (which has yet to be initiated) towards existing successful interventions requiring additional assistance to, for example publicise the work, supporting local authorities with further SAP implementation, etc, In all cases guided by national recommendations.

The MTR rates **Component 1 overall as Moderately Satisfactory – Satisfactory**. The work of Cambodia, China and Thailand is considered Satisfactory – Highly Satisfactory; Philippines is considered to be likely to be completed (subject to a project extension) but the work in Indonesia and Vietnam will be very challenging to complete even with a realistic project extension of 1 year.

### **Component 2 - Strengthening knowledge-based action planning for the management of coastal habitats and land-based pollution to reduce environmental degradation of the South China Sea**

A focus of Component 2 is on identifying regional and national information on coastal habitats, potential of Blue Economy activities and role, identifying and quantifying Land-Based Sources and loads, etc. that feed into an updated regional TDA (based on national assessments) leading to an agreed updated SAP (building on the 2008 endorsed SAP). It is expected that the SAP will be submitted for approval by the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) in October 2026 for subsequent regional implementation through updated national action plans, post-project.

Consultants have only recently been recruited to work on the national and regional data collection and analysis to update the TDA/SAP, and the information presented in the 2024 PIR and December 2024 Quarterly progress report does not present an up-to-date assessment of the progress. The consultants working on the TDA/SAP and key stakeholders (including COBSEA) have expressed confidence that the SAP will be finalised in time for the IGM, which is supported with a clear and detailed workplan. The MTR recommends that the PCU/EA consider the development workplan as a good practice for all remaining outputs, to enable ease of monitoring and demonstration of progress

Under component 2, actions will also be initiated to assist with management of coastal habitats. A range of tools and techniques will be developed that will feed into an overall knowledge management system to guide the long-term implementation of the SAP. To-date little work has been completed on these activities.

The PCU, with output from the Project Retreat workshop, has directed the main outputs of Component 2 on two key Deliverables: SEA:LEARN (supported by a detailed concept note and associated workplan on how this will be achieved) and SEA:STARS (updated SAP).

The MTR rates **Component 2 as MU-MS**. However, the MTR does note that the Project, with the support of the countries and key stakeholders has a realistic plan on how the outcomes associated with Component 2 will be delivered.

### **Component 3 – Facilitating regional and national level integration and cooperation for implementation of the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme**

To-date there has been little progress on the Component 3 activities as shown in Annex 6. The key elements of this component are aimed towards providing options to sustain the future SAP implementation coordination through a regional mechanism. The focus, as presented by the PCU, is on utilising the structures of COBSEA (also based in Bangkok) and

the MTR is of the opinion (supported by multiple statements from stakeholders in the region) that this is the most appropriate way forward.

In addition to obtaining necessary approval for this from the SCS-SAP PSC the project will need to assist COBSEA with seeking approval from their constituents (not all are within the SCS project).

The project will assist with identifying potential financing mechanism to support the regional coordination of the SAP and to further support the SAP through a small-grants facility. Currently there are concept notes describing the key Deliverables from the Project Retreat on these activities, but no significant activities have yet been initiated.

During this MTR the consultant has been impressed with the work of the current pilots and will be recommending, in the interests of available time, to utilise current contacts (in local authorities, communities etc.) to direct the expected SGP towards actions to build on the success in Component 1 pilots. The project could also save time by using selection criteria developed by the UNDP SGP and/or IUCN in the region. The MTR discussions with stakeholders provided several good suggestions for SGP actions (including national 'cook books on products from 'habitats', support to authorities on SAP implementation, community awareness raising materials, encouraging local private sector support), and the MTR recommends that the PCU explore with national and local partners engaged in the project for initial quick, small-grant project concepts. The more difficult aspect will be the development of a feasible financing mechanism and whilst the concept lays the objective there is still work to do in identifying a realistic regional mechanism to sustain the governance structure. The MTR held interviews with PEMSEA and the PCU and it could be beneficial for the Project to continue this dialogue to explore options for financing that are being considered for that region.

The PCU, with output from the Project Retreat workshop, has directed the main outputs of Component 3 on the key Deliverables: SEA:PUFFER (supported by the detailed concept note and associated workplan on how a sustainable regional governance mechanism could be established) which should provide guidance on project priorities.

The MTR rates **Component 3** as **Moderately Unsatisfactory – Moderately Satisfactory**. However, the MTR does note that the Project, with the support of the countries and key stakeholders has a realistic plan on how the outcomes associated with Component 3 will be delivered.

Annex 6 presents an overview of 'implementation status' of all 64 outputs in Components 1-3 abstracted from the 2004 PIR and, for comparison, on recent progress from the Quarter 4 2024 progress report.

Overall, the MTR rates the **Availability of Outputs** as **Moderately Unsatisfactory - Satisfactory**.

### 5.3.3 Progress towards Project Outcomes

<b>Project Objective and Outcomes</b>	<b>PIR (24) rating</b>
Outcome 1.1 Appropriate forms of sustainable management established for 860,000 ha of mangrove	S
Outcome 1.2 110,430 ha of coral reef at 46 priority sites managed sustainably, including a reduction in the decadal rate of degradation in live coral cover from 16 to 5%	S
Outcome 1.3 Conservation, management and sustainable use of 15,848 ha of known seagrass area in the South China Sea	S
Outcome 1.4 Integrated management of 783,900 ha of coastal wetland at 19 sites, including habitat restoration and protection strengthened at priority locations	S
Outcome 1.5 National and regional level cooperation in tracking results of SAP actions for coastal habitat management	S
Outcome 2.1 Enhanced information-base for coastal habitat management, monitoring and action planning	MU-MS
Outcome 2.2 Effective integration of regional science in the management of land-based pollution	MU
Outcome 2.3 Strengthened and harmonized national policies and laws, and supporting financial mechanism, for the management of habitats and land-based sources of pollution	MU-MS
Outcome 2.4 Updated Total Economic Values of coastal habitats for use in development planning and decision-making and blue economy	MU
Outcome 2.5 Regionally appropriate tools and mechanisms to guide the development of sustainable management systems for coastal habitats and land-based pollution	MU
Outcome 2.6 Updated and Ministerially adopted Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme, including prioritization of national management actions to address climate variability and change	MU
Outcome 3.1 Regional and sub-regional co-operation in the integration of scientific knowledge and research outputs with management and policy making	MU-S
Outcome 3.2 Capacity for civil society and community organization participation in SAP implementation strengthened via operational partnership with GEF SGP	MU
Outcome 3.3 Relationships between central and local governments and the private sector strengthened and formalized	MU
Outcome 3.4 Revitalization of regional mechanisms for communications, knowledge exchange, and information and data management and sharing	MS-S
Outcome 3.5 Agreed arrangements for strengthened regional cooperation in the management of the marine and coastal environment of the South China Sea	MU

Source: 10124 PIR. As there multiple entries for some outcomes the range of ratings is presented.

Table 6 - Summary of the progress towards the 16 project outcomes

**Outcomes associated with Component 1:** Only Component 1 (5 outcomes) is rated as Satisfactory in the 2025 PIR and the MTR support this assessment with the clear achievements of the *active* pilot actions to support the specific habitats.

The pilots in the Philippines have recently been initiated (see above) and the MTR considers it likely that a short additional project extension would see these concluded satisfactorily based on discussions with national stakeholders. However (as mentioned above) the pilots in Indonesia and Vietnam still require agreements (MoU and PCA respectively) to be agreed. The MTR is recommending that these are discussed at the next PSC and a decision taken on the next steps.

**Outcomes associated with Component 2:** Whilst the PIR 2024 does not show much progress towards delivering the expected Outcomes, many of the activities (in support of the TDA/SAP update) are now in progress. National and regional stakeholders, the PCU and the consultants responsible for the delivery of the update SAP are confident that this will be completed in time for submission/approval at the COBSEA IGM in October 2026.

**Outcomes associated with Component 3:** To-date there has been little progress on Component 3 outputs and hence low progress towards the Outcomes associated with Component 3. However, discussions with the PCU have indicated that these are planned – especially the means to achieve a long-term sustainable SAP coordination body: the current preferred approach is to utilise the structures of COBSEA and direct Component 3 activities to delivering tools and mechanisms that will support COBSEA. Specifically the SEA:LEARN (information management sharing and repository) and SEA:PUFFER (that will deliver a small grants approach and a mechanism to raise finances. These are key issues that were discussed in the Project Retreat and shown in Figure 3. To this end the PCU and the MTR consultant held discussions with the PEMSEA Secretariat to identify common areas where approaches could be shared that are under development in PEMSEA and could be replicated by the SCS-SAP project/COBSEA.

During the MTR mission field trip, the consultant was provided by a lunch prepared by the local community utilising products from the mangroves. The harvests from these habitats are providing a beneficial additional livelihood to the communities through local markets. It could be of interest to collate inputs of recipes from all the pilots across the region to highlight the beneficial aspects of this project to all stakeholders and provide an interesting additional output of the project.

Component 3 also includes activities responding to the requirement to work with the GEF IW:LEARN project. The project was well represented at the GEF IW Conference in 2024 and is planning regional activities with IW:LEARN on Blue Economy actions with other GEF projects. The project is planning several GEF IW Experience Notes.

The MTR rates the **Progress towards Outcomes** as **Moderately Unsuccessful - Moderately Satisfactory**. However as indicated the momentum achieved by the current PCU to deliver the project goals gives the MTR consultant confidence that the intended outcomes will be achieved (albeit with a short additional project extension).

#### 5.3.4 Likelihood of Impact

The Project is currently focusing on the recommendations from the Retreat (October 2024) that repackaged the key deliverables into specific groups that encompass all 16 outcomes. This is summarised in Section 4 and are directed towards the possibility that COBSEA would take on the responsibility of regional coordination of the updated SAP. This refocusing of the Project is predicated that the recommendations are adopted by the PSC and that COBSEA IGM accepts the role.

These key Deliverable are centred on critical outputs that will lead to direct impacts on the sustainability of the SCS-SAP outputs. Specifically:

- The results, experience and local support for the pilot habitat pilot projects which are testing preliminary approaches relevant to SAP implementation prior to wider upscaling and replication;
- Updating of the 2008 TDA/SAP through the collection of recent information on the status and pressures on the waters of the SCS and their associated habitats. The update of the TDA/SAP will also take account of issues that were not included as priorities 20 years ago (including climate change, gender and human rights needs, regional and global convention/agreements such as the CBD 30x30, BBNJ, etc.);
- Identifying a long-term governance structure for SAP coordination, including:
  - Developing an information and knowledge hub for regional stakeholders (SEA:LEARN)
  - Developing approaches to initiating a Small Grants Programme to support communities, local authorities, NGOs etc; (SEA:PUFFER)
  - Developing a financing mechanism to support a SGP and provide resources for the long-term Regional coordination of the SAP; (SEA:PUFFER)

The PCU has identified that there may be certain outputs that will not be completed by the current project end date (December 2026). These include, for example, the pilot in the Philippines, developing and testing a SGP and recommending an approach to instigate a long-term regional financing mechanism to facilitate sustainable regional SAP coordination/governance. The MTR is recommending that *part* of the project should be extended with a reduced PCU to manage these under UNOPS. The MTR is also recommending that this reduced PCU is co-located with COBSEA to facilitate the phased closure of the SCS-SAP project and the adoption of the tools and mechanisms by COBSEA. These recommendations are clearly subject to PSC and COBSEA's IGM approval.

The steps being taken by the countries, supported by the Project indicate that the Likelihood of Impact will be **Likely**.

#### 5.3.5 Adaptive Management

The project has employed adaptive management approaches in a number of situations, including:

- Recommending the appointment of National Coordinators in each of the six countries. This was proposed during the Inception Phase and accepted as an important mechanism to assist with national activities. This has proved successful

from both the perspective of the PCU and national representatives interviewed for this MTR;

- The Project Retreat (October 2026) following a regional meeting is considered by the PCU and MTR as a significant innovation to speed up the delivery of this very delayed project. The participants were drawn from national and regional bodies and included experts from the project, the PCU and the UNEP Task Manager. The Retreat benefited from a professional facilitator that all considered to be a significant asset and contributed to the success of the two day Retreat. The results of the Retreat will aid the presentation of the project in a more manageable form than the original Project Documents/Result Framework.
- COVID 19 – as with all activities globally between 2020 and 2022 this had a major impact, delaying the project initiation, preventing in-person workshops, etc. The Project responded with remote meetings where possible.

The MTR assessment of **Adaptive Management** is **Satisfactory**.

#### 5.4 D. Financial Management

Figure 5 clearly shows the very slow spend rate until 2023/2024 as a result of the delays incurred by the project. A summary of the expenditure to-date per component and the current level of co-financing is presented in Annex 7.

The UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO) noted that significant progress had been observed recently based on quarterly reporting although there are substantial cash requests that do not align with the actual spend rate or spending levels. The FMO suggest that cash requests should be based on quarterly projections rather than the half yearly projections. The MTR suggests that UNEP (as the GEF Agency) initiate discussions, if necessary, with UNOPS (as the Executing Agency) to resolve this issue bilaterally.

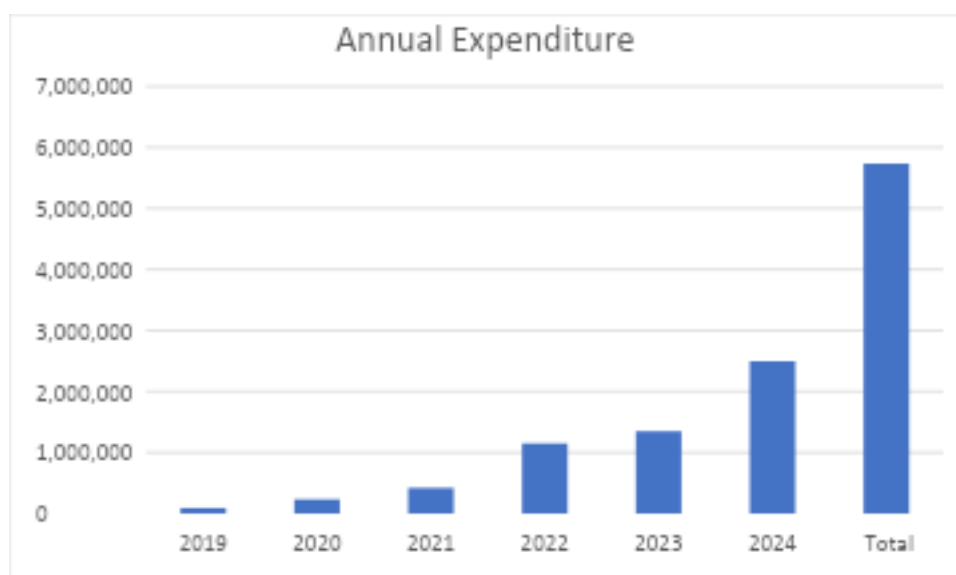


Figure 5 Annual expenditure (data provided by PCU)

#### Specific Ratings:

i) **Adherence to UNEP policies and completeness of financial information:** The MTR rates this as **Moderately Satisfactory – Satisfactory** (see comment and recommendation above)

ii) **Availability of financial information:** The FMO did not indicate that there was any missing information. The MTR rates this as **Satisfactory**

#### **ToR Requested information for the GEF**

i) Time from CEO endorsement to first disbursement: (November 2016 to January 2018) - **14 months**

ii) Disbursement balance: Total expenditure reported by PCU (December 2024) 5,734,028 USD **remaining GEF grant – 9,265,972 USD** (December 2024).

iii) Whether the project has secured Co-financing higher than 35%: **The project is reporting cofinancing 92.197 MUSD** (at CEO Endorsement the expectation was 83.452 MUSD)

iv) Time between CEO Endorsement and conclusion of MTR. **99 months.** (Completion of MTR expected March 2025).

The MTR rates overall **Financial Management** of the Project as **Satisfactory**

### **5.5 E. Efficiency**

The SCS-SAP project is very delayed due to multiple reasons discussed above. On the basis of these delays the rating at the MTR is considered poor for 'Efficiency'. These delays include:

- Withdrawal of SEAFDEC as an EA and finalising agreement with UNOPS to execute the whole project;
- The need to recruit three Project Managers – the current Project Manager was appointed in May 2023 (with a gap of over 1 year when there was no project manager in-post);
- Establishing PCAs (or equivalent) between the countries and UNOPS (2 countries have yet to sign the agreement)

**Cost effectiveness:** The project is working towards enabling COBSEA, which represents all the countries in the SCS-SAP project, with tools and approaches to enhance their sustainability to coordinate the regional implementation of the SAP. The MTR supports the approach of phasing out the project by extending specific outputs for one year and housing a reduced 'PCU' in the offices of COBSEA will facilitate the exit of the project with the transfer of important project deliverables to support their role with the SAP implementation.

The MTR rates the **Cost-Effectiveness** of the Project as **Satisfactory**

**Timeliness of project execution:** As stressed above, the project execution is very delayed and is therefore rated as moderately unsatisfactory, but the MTR considers that the prognosis for a successful conclusion of the project is likely.

The MTR considers that a project no-cost extension will be required for some of the project outputs (Sections 5.3.2 and 5.3.3). The MTR proposes that this extension will require a small

team (not the current full PCU) to manage the phased closure of the project and the transfer of the results to COBSEA.

Project milestone	Date
PIF Cleared (GEFSec Approval)	April 2014
GEF CEO Endorsement	November 2016
Project Start (UNEP approval)	December 2017
1 <sup>st</sup> Disbursement	January 2018
Project Inception Meeting	June 2021
1 <sup>st</sup> PSC (virtual)	June 2021
2 <sup>nd</sup> PSC	January 2024
MTR	January – March 2025
Planned completion	June 2023
Revised completion (PSC 2021)	December 2024
Revised completion (PSC 2024)	December 2026

Table 7 - Key milestones in the project development and implantation are summarised in.

Based on the project timeline and the need for several project extensions the MTR rates the **Timeliness of Project Execution as Moderately Unsatisfactory.**

Overall, the MTR rates **Efficiency as Moderately Unsatisfactory - Satisfactory**

## 5.6 F. Monitoring and Reporting

A detailed and costed M&E plan was presented in the Project Document and the GEF CEO Endorsement submission. The plan included all expected and necessary progress (quarterly, annual, inception, workplans, etc.) and financial (quarterly and certified annual) reports, PIRs, PSC meetings and made provisions for the MTR and Terminal Evaluation (TE). With the exception of the TE, all reports are the responsibility of the EA and the PCU, to be delivered to the IA and the PSC.

As emphasised above, the Project Results Framework was very complex with 16 outcomes and 64 indicators. Whilst the majority of the indicators would be considered ‘SMART’ the total number is considered to be detrimental to the monitoring and reporting.<sup>5</sup>

At the time of the project’s endorsement the GEF IW tracking tool was in operation. The MTR consultant has tentatively drafted suggested GEF 7 IW Core Indicators that could be relevant to this project if required:

- Indicator 2.2 Marine protected areas under improved management effectiveness
- Indicator 7.1 Level of Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme (TDA/SAP) formulation and implementation
- Indicator 7.2 Level of Regional Legal Agreements and Regional Management Institutions to support its implementation

<sup>5</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

- Indicator 7.3 Level of National/Local reforms and active participation of Inter-Ministerial Committees
- Indicator 7.4 Level of engagement in IWLEARN through participation and delivery of key products
- Indicator 11 People benefiting from GEF-financed investments (disaggregated by sex)

Stakeholder comments included:

- *The project's M&E system faced limitation in tracking stress reduction benefits and evaluating effectiveness.*
- *The Project has made significant changes to some pilot sites but the associated indicators and associated targets (e.g. ha habitats, etc.) have not be adjusted and countries are still reporting against the original targets presented in the CEO Endorsement Document.*

### 5.6.1 Monitoring of Project Implementation

Project monitoring was guided by the Project Results Framework and the 'indicators' presented there. As previously mentioned, the Project Results Framework was very detailed with over 60 indicators. The MTR considers this to be an excessive number of indicators that undoubtedly places a significant burden on the PCU to monitor and report.

The project is proposing to add some gender-specific indicators where appropriate and will be recruiting a consultant to assist with this. Currently only disaggregated sex information is collected with regards to participants at meetings/workshops.

The PCU reports that to-date there have been no significant changes made to the Project Results Framework. The MTR is recommending that it would be timely to review the indicators and targets to ensure that they are aligned with the current project activities. The MTR also recommends that the Project utilises the next PIR reporting to simplify the presentation of the progress (currently over 100 pages are devoted to reporting the progress of outcomes and outputs with highly repetitive text).

The MTR rates **Monitoring of Project Implementation** as **Satisfactory**

### 5.6.2 Project Reporting

The Project has prepared PIRs since 2020 (indicated in the 2024 PIR), reporting progress against the 64 outputs/indicators and 16 outcomes. As reported above, the MTR considers that this places a significant burden on the PCU. In addition to the number of outputs/indicators the project also reports achievements on each habitat (mangroves, seagrasses, coral reefs and coastal wetlands. This results in a very repetitive account of the activities for with each output in Component 1 being report for four habitats. The PIR (2024) output reporting requires 57 pages and the 16 outcomes using 51 pages. The MTR does think this level of reporting is effective at conveying the real progress and achievements of the project. The MTR considers the current approach to reporting excessive, and repetitive, detail, to be reconsidered for the forthcoming (2025) PIR.

The national pilots report quarterly with a detailed report that feeds-in to the Project's quarterly report to UNEP. Project consultants' report monthly on their activities to the PCU/UNOPS, the MTR suggests that consultants ensure they discuss the requirements of PCU/EA with their contracting bodies.

Whilst all the information is valid, the MTR questions if the quantity of reporting is necessary and beneficial to those who utilise the reports. The MTR is recommending that the PCU could identify a more effective and efficient means of conveying progress that is compliant with the GEF and UNEP's requirement.

Overall, the MTR rates the **Monitoring & Evaluation** as **Moderately Satisfactory - Satisfactory** (due to the excessive reporting requirements from the project's design)

## 5.7 G. Exit Strategy and Sustainability

The Project has been designed to identify a long-term sustainable organisation that would continue with the coordination of the implementation of the updated SAP. To this end, the SCS-SAP Project has been working with UNEP's Regional Sea – COBSEA. The Project has documented the important steps need to complete work that will be essential for the future SAP coordination role and has summarised these in three comprehensive concept notes on SEA:LEARN, financing (including small grants) and SEA:PUFFER (See Figure 3), that will be required for the effective governance and coordination of the SAP implementation.

Stakeholders' comments on sustainability include:

- *Very supportive of the regional SAP coordination and governance role being embedded in the work of COBSEA.*
- *Difficulties in sustaining long-term funding is a major issue beyond the initial mobilisation of project resources.*
- *Future initiatives should integrate innovative financing mechanisms such as private-public partnerships, blue carbon markets, ecotourism revenue.*
- *Enforcement and compliance gaps remain and need to be addressed.*
- *Financial sustainability could be achieved by proposing the creation of a SCS Marine Conservation fund to finance SAP-related actions post project. Potential funding sources could include government budgets, grants (GEF, UNEP), World Bank and ADB. This could also include Blue Economy financing with a 'Blue Fund' with private sector investments from shipping, fisheries, tourism, etc., and corporate social responsibility (CSR) investments in marine conservation.*
- *Knowledge management should focus on developing a SAP knowledge hub to share scientific data, best practices, etc.*

The MTR has identified that the Project is likely to require a further extension of a year to complete remaining pilots (e.g. Philippines and potentially Indonesia and Vietnam) and identifying potential financing mechanisms and testing of a possible small grants approach. The MTR is recommending that these final activities could be supervised by a 1-2 PCU staff (under UNOPS) housed within COBSEA's office (subject to space availability). This would enable a phased closure of the project and assist with the transfer of main outputs and mechanisms to sustain the SAP coordination. These actions would serve as the Project's

Exit Strategy and lead directly to a sustainable approach to the regional, long-term, SAP governance mechanism.

As previously stated, these steps will require formal approval by the PSC and the COBSEA IGM, but based on the comments of national stakeholders the MTR is confident that this will not be a problem.

#### 5.7.1 Level of Ownership , Interest and Commitment

Interviews conducted during the mission to the Project region (in-person and remote) indicate a high level of support to the work being undertaken. There was frustration in the countries with the time taken between the original SAP endorsement and the launch of this project. The countries utilised this time to start SAP implementation utilising their own resources and the project is in the process of collating all these additional national investments and actions on policies and practices.

National stakeholders also expressed approval of project work and updating TDA/SAP for long-term protection of habitats and strengthening communities' sustainable livelihoods.

#### 5.7.2 Institutional and Governance Sustainability

A key output under Component 3 is an assessment of possible institutional and governance arrangements for the long-term sustainability for the SAP coordination. Possible existing regional options suggested by stakeholders include the ASEAN, SEAFDEC and COBSEA. The Project Retreat also highlighted COBSEA as a key regional body that would be an effective to support the SAP Coordination and to maintain the other outputs from the Project (see Figure 3). Whilst the Project still has to reach a considered option for the SAP coordination body, initial the MTR's discussion with the COBSEA secretariat and national project stakeholders confirmed that this would be an acceptable way forward. Clearly this decision will have to be presented to the PSC and the COBSEA IGM.

The COBSEA option also offers a possible mechanism to consider a further extension of the project duration with a phased transfer of the outputs to the secretariat and the possible provision of an office for a reduced PCU during the extension (still under the UNOPS PCA).

At the national level stakeholders indicated that there was continuing support for the national pilots and support for COBSEA.

#### 5.7.3 Future Financing

One of the key Deliverables identified at the Project Retreat was for the identification of possible financing mechanism to support small grants and regional coordination of the SAP implementation. A consultant is still to be appointed to undertake this study, and this activity is strongly encouraged by the MTR to identify options as quickly as possible. The MTR suggests that the consultant should also explore the approaches used by other regional bodies (e.g. PEMSEA and the Caribbean coordination mechanisms).

Overall, the MTR rates the Project's **Exit Strategy and Sustainability** as **Likely**

## 5.8 Factors affecting Performance

### 5.8.1 Project Inception

A detailed Project Inception Phase was held in early 2021 culminating in an Inception Report and Meeting followed by a 1<sup>st</sup> PSC (June 2021). A comprehensive report was prepared that included some minor modifications to the wording of some outputs. The Inception phase also led to the introduction of the position of National Coordinators in each country. The MTR considers these and a benefit to engage countries and to assist the PCU to manage the project's activities more effectively.

The MTR rates the **Project Inception** as **Satisfactory**

### 5.8.2 Quality of Project Management and Supervision

As previously discussed, the Project has had to recruit three Project Managers which has contributed to delays. The current PCU is well motivated and focussed on delivery of this Project and developing links with related regional bodies (e.g. PEMSEA, IOW-WESTPAC, IUCN, ACB - ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity). The Project has been late in recruiting a communication consultant, but this is currently in-progress.

Only two PSC meetings have been held. The first was linked to the Project's Inception Workshop (in June 2021 under COVID restrictions) and the second was in January 2024. The next meeting is planned for May 2025.

The project was endorsed with two Executing Agencies. UNOPS was initially responsible for the national activities of Component 1 and for the PCU. SEAFDEC had responsibilities for the regional activities in Components 2 and 3. SEAFDEC's PCA with UNEP was terminated after they withdrew in December 2022. The MTR held discussions with SEAFDEC to better understand the reason they withdrew: they considered the nature of this project to be too far from their regional interests in fisheries. The MTR also noted that the PCU was wholly staffed with UNOPS recruited staff (based within SEAFDEC's offices but not able to take any direction from SEAFDEC) and this is considered, by the MTR as a contributing factor to the countries' perception that the main part of the project was Component 1 and they were not engaged in other aspects. The MTR considers this a key lesson for multi-agency execution projects that the PCU should reflect the key components being undertaken.

The Executing Agency (UNOPS) is responsible to UNEP for the PCU and recruitment of consultants. They have comprehensive resources to assist with recruitment and organise travel for the project. There is an officer within the EA that is dedicated to facilitating this project (50% time).

The UNEP Task Manager has attended a number of meetings for the Project, including the significant Project Retreat (October 2024) that identified the 'key Deliverables' that will help the project focus on achieving the delayed programme. The TM also participates at PSC meetings and is available to address key questions from the PCU.

Stakeholders' comments on the project management included:

- *The PCU has been very effective and efficient in dealing with problems and issues as they arose. They have demonstrated excellent and timely support and guidance to National Coordinators.*
- *Although meetings were generally well organised, improvements are necessary, in particular on the follow-up to action points on decisions and tracking of implementation of these actions.*
- *PSC (2024) was poorly organised with unclear objectives with ineffective communication from the PCU.*
- *It would be beneficial if senior staff from the PCU attended site visits in addition to the National Coordinators.*

Whilst most comments are highly supportive of the PCU, it is important that organisation of meetings (including PSC) have a clear objective with guidance on key messages from the expected appointment of the Communication Officer. Meetings, as with all other aspects of the project, require a high level of project management to ensure they deliver their objectives.

The MTR rates the **Quality of the Project Management and Supervision** as **Satisfactory** (both UNEP and UNOPS/PCU are rated as Satisfactory)

### 5.8.3 Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation

Stakeholder participations in the multiple meetings, workshops, committees, and technical groups have been extensive and highly participative. The MTR mission highlighted the high level engagement through the meeting with the pilot site in Ban Don Bay with local representatives of the DMCR and communities engaged and the MTR's participation in the First Asian Dialogues on Seagrasses and Dugong Conservation workshop in Bangkok, co-organised by COBSEA, IKI (International Climate Initiative) and the GEF SCS-SAP project.

Stakeholders were generally very supportive of the meetings and other events organised by the Project comments included:

- *Participation featured multi-sectoral participation, bringing together government agencies, universities, NGOs and community representatives that helped to foster regional collaboration between ASEAN countries.*
- *Project meetings were effectively organised, managed and reported.*
- *Further local-level engagement with stakeholders was necessary, in particular to involve community representatives and private sector in decision making on proposed activities. In addition, there is always a need to engage more private sector at the local level.*
- *Continuous effort is needed to fully integrate local perspectives, secure sustainable funding and enhance enforcement mechanism.*
- *Stakeholder engagement and capacity building could be further enhanced through encouraging CSR initiatives from business relying on marine resources.*

The MTR notes that a key capacity building activities (e.g. Outcome 3.2 - *Capacity for civil society and community organization participation in SAP implementation strengthened via operational partnership with GEF SGP*) have not progressed. This should be addressed by the PCU urgently.

The MTR rates the **Stakeholder Participation and Cooperation** as **Satisfactory**

#### 5.8.4 Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality

This was not part of the CEO endorsement document expectation. However, the project is mindful to record disaggregated data from participants attendance at meetings and encouraging participation of women and youth at these meetings. The project intends to develop a gender strategy within a broader stakeholder engagement plan.

The Project Document stated (P124), *this project will: advance gender equality and social inclusion (gender awareness); balance women and men’s participation in decision-making; reflect the different roles and responsibilities of men and women and the different values they may hold; strive for inclusiveness, cooperation and partnerships; document how gender and diversity issues were made central to project implementation; and provide for appropriate gender mainstreaming opportunities at all levels (planning, management, and monitoring and evaluation)*. The MTR suggests that gender issues are considered as soon as possible when addressing recommendation to update the Project Results Framework.

Human Rights issues were not part of the project design, but the PCU confirmed that no concerns had been raised from the regional or national activities.

The MTR rates the **Responsiveness to Human Rights and Gender Equality** as **Moderately Satisfactory**

#### 5.8.5 Environmental and Social Safeguards

As part of the monitoring plans for national pilot actions, the PCU has informed the MTR that safeguarding impacts from these interventions will be assessed.

The MTR rates the **Environmental and Social Safeguards** as **Moderately Satisfactory**

#### 5.8.6 Country Ownership and Driven-ness

The countries are active partners to the project and participants in the project’s meetings and workshops. Interviews with national stakeholders indicated a good level of awareness in the SCS-SAP that has been built up over 20+ years since the first phase of the project. The only significant negative comment was associated with the time-lag between the endorsement of the 2008 SAP and the time to initiate the current project.

The national actions within Component 1 (specifically the pilot interventions on piloting SAP implementation actions) received very significant approval from national and local authorities and, based on the site visit conducted by the MTR mission, significant support and awareness of the importance and the benefits from the pilots and their potential for upscaling/replication.

Stakeholder support was also high for the work being undertaken to update the TDA and SAP (through multiple actions within Component 2).

Stakeholder interviewed also indicated support for the PCU suggestion that the appropriate body to address the long-term SAP coordination was through the Regional Seas Body – COBSEA. This view was also supported within the COBSEA secretariat.

Stakeholder comments included:

- *The project fostered beneficial multi-sectoral collaboration linking environment, fisheries agencies integrating MPA management with fisheries refugia efforts.*
- *Further private sector focus and engagement would be welcome to aid long-term sustainability.*

The MTR rates the **Country Ownership and Driven-ness** as **Satisfactory**

### 5.8.7 Communications and Public Awareness

The Project Inception Report highlighted the importance of Communications, knowledge management and awareness. The expectation was that a project communication strategy would be elaborated 'with the support of a communications officer' and priorities for this role were detailed in the Inception Report. The PCU/UNOPS are currently in the process of recruiting this specialist.

The project website is maintained with news of past and forthcoming meetings and key activities but lacks recent details of project results and achievements. The website has to be revalidated to ensure that the information is valid (for example the current Project Manager is not listed in the PCU staff). It will be beneficial if the Communications Officer (and other PCU staff) undertake a rapid review of the information on the website. The project staff (and consultants) all have 'UNOPS' email addresses which the MTR considers as a disadvantage in creating a clear GEF project identity within the SCS region.

A number of stakeholders have raised the lack of 'project overview' information. The project is a very large and complex one and there has been confusion from countries over their 'involvement' – primarily that the original PCAs only related to Component 1 activities that were the responsibility under UNOPS. It would be beneficial if the project could provide some clear emphasis to that the countries of their involvement (and the benefits derived from the actions) in all the project. Important in the time left that the project also reports (in a readily assessable form) the achievements and next steps of the project to ensure there is more general awareness of the deliverables (and results supporting these) from the project.

The Project has engaged with GEF IW:LEARN and participated in the IW Conference in 2024 and contributed in its portfolio bulletins. Details of communication activities are presented in the PIRs. In addition to earlier project participation in regional events including the EAS Congress, IOC/WESTPAC Conference, the MTR consultant was able to attend the First Asian Regional Dialogue on Seagrasses and Dugong Conservation (20-21 February 2025, Bangkok), where the project was able to present work on the coastal habitats and the SAP update eventually regional governance.

Stakeholder comments included:

- *The meetings/workshops were also of high quality and effectively met the needs of participants. However, there were some areas for improvement, particularly in the*

*coordination and synthesis of reports, which experienced some delays. Online communication tools proved effective in ensuring accessibility and engaging stakeholders.*

- *Having more reports and guidelines at the regional level could have strengthened information sharing, supporting decision-making, monitoring, and evaluation.*
- *Increased engagement from the PCU through formal and online channels could have helped bridge any gaps between national and regional efforts, fostering better coordination and stakeholder involvement.*
- *There were no regular updates or effective communications regarding knowledge sharing with only meeting photos and news posts on SCS-SAP Facebook and website. While countries held numerous activities and events, these were not promoted to the wider region.*
- *Public awareness should be initiated as early as possible to ensure uptake of project's results.*
- *All documents for meetings should be provided well in advance.*

The MTR recommends that when the Communication specialist is on-board, it could be beneficial to explore seeking additional in-country assistance from the National Coordinators to ensure success stories from national pilots, workshops and other events are effectively disseminated across all stakeholders of the SCS-SAP Project.

The MTR rates the **Communication and Public Awareness** as **Moderately Satisfactory**

## 6 Conclusions

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
<b>A. Strategic Relevance</b>	The project is closely aligned with the priorities of the countries, UNEP PoW and the GEF.	S
1. Alignment to UNEP's, Donors and Country (global, regional, sub-regional and national) strategic priorities		HS
2. Complementarity/Coherence with relevant existing interventions		S
<b>B. Quality &amp; Revision of Project Design</b>	Whilst the project is comprehensively explained, the MTR considers the large number of outcomes as a significant burden on reporting and has not assisted countries' understanding of the overall project	S
<b>C. Effectiveness</b>	The overall lack of progress on outcomes/outputs due to multiple reasons is considered poor. However the MTR anticipates that recent steps taken by the project should achieve the expected results, subject to an addition project extension.	MS
1. Theory of change	Not required at CEO Endorsement. Developed during Inception phase.	
2. Availability of outputs	The MTR notes that there has been an uneven deliver of project outputs and rates the components progress to-date as: Component 1 MS- S Component 2 MU – MS Component 3 MU - MS	MU-S
3. Progress towards project outcomes, including towards indicators	The outcomes under Component 1 have progressed and is rated S Component 2 outcomes have recently started to progress with actions to update the TDA/SAP and are rated between MU and S Component 3 outcomes (mainly) have yet to implemented and this is a significant concern and requires urgent attention. Outcomes are rated MU- S	MU-S
4. Likelihood of impact, includes innovativeness and replication and scalability	Steps taken by the project arising from the project 'Retreat' are encouraging with regards to the emphasis. The MTR considers that if the PCU remains highly focused and the EA is able to recruit consultants quickly then the project will meet its expected goals (subject to a short additional extension)	L

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
5. Adaptive management	There have been a few examples of adaptive management (National Coordinators, Project Retreat)	S
<b>D. Financial Management</b>	No issues were reported on financial management	S
1. Adherence to UNEP's/Donor policies and procedures		S
2. Completeness of project financial information		S
<b>E. Efficiency</b>	The Project has had multiple delays following GEF endorsement of this 5-year project in 2016. The cost effectiveness of the project is considered S The timeliness of the project execution is considered as MU	MU - S
<b>F. Monitoring and Reporting</b>	The design of the project has made monitoring and reporting more difficult for the PCU. The monitoring has been undertaken effectively.	S
1. Monitoring of project implementation		S
2. Project reporting		
<b>G. Exit Strategy &amp; Sustainability</b>	The recent project Retreat has provided a clear statement of the project's goal of a sustainable governance of the SAP coordination through COBSEA (representatives of COBSEA Secretariat participated in this Retreat))	L
<b>H. Factors Affecting Performance and Cross-Cutting Issues</b>		HS à HU
1. Project Inception	A detailed Inception phase /report was conducted resulting in ToC, identification of benefits of National Coordinators	S
2. Quality of project management and supervision		S
2.1 UNEP/Implementing Agency:	No issues were identified.	S
2.2 Partners/Executing Agency:	The departure of one of the EAs (SEAFDEC) led to a further delay in the project. But the current sole EA (UNOPS) has been effective.	S
3. Stakeholders participation and cooperation	There has been good regional and national participation in project activities	S
4. Responsiveness to human rights and gender equality	Whilst gender is mentioned in the Project Documents it was not a requirement to have a gender strategy (or detailed human rights assessment) at CEO endorsement. The project does record disaggregated sex information on participation at meetings and is expecting to develop addition indicators/targets to report against	MS
5. Environmental and social safeguards	This was not a requirement at CEO endorsement, but the project is anticipating undertaking an assessment of any impacts at the	MS

Criterion	Summary Assessment	Rating
	pilots sites (although the MTR does not anticipate any negative issues)	
6. Country ownership and driven-ness	The project goals are well supported by countries	S
7. Communication and public awareness	This is a significant gap in the project. More attention is expected now that a communication specialist is in the process of being recruited.	MS
<b>Overall Project Rating</b>	The project rating is based on the performance (as reported in PIRs, Quarterly reports and the MTR's assessment of progress) and is clearly very delayed. Despite this poor rating the MTR considers it likely that the project will deliver the main activities expected and importantly deliver a sustainable mechanism for the SAP coordination. <b>HOWEVER</b> , this will expect a very proactive management by the PCU/EA of the remaining activities and quick response to any issues that arise.	MU - MS

Table 8 - Project Performance Ratings Table

## Conclusion overview

The previous phase of the GEF SCS project led to the endorsed SAP in 2008 that provided the overall environmental goal and specific actions required to address the key transboundary problems. The current SCS-SAP project has been developed with wide stakeholder engagement. This was endorsed by the GEF CEO in November 2016 and approved by UNEP for implementation in December 2017. The project was approved with two EAs: UNOPS with responsibility for the national activities in Component 1 and for the PCU; and, SEAFDEC having responsibility for the regional activities in Components 2 and 3.

The project has had significant delays in execution from COVID 19 restrictions, the loss of SEAFDEC as an EA (PCA terminated in December 2022) and the recruitment of three project managers, with the current project manager starting in May 2023 after a gap of a year to recruit.

The project held a productive Inception Phase under COVID 19 restrictions (all meetings were remote) leading to a comprehensive and clear Inception Report. This identified minor changes to outcome/output wordings and significantly identified the need for the positions of National Coordinators in each country. The Inception Phase culminated in a first PSC meeting in June 2021 (also remote) that recommended a no-cost extension to June 2024. Following the appointment of the current Project Manager, and the departure of SEAFDEC, a second PSC was held in January 2024 that identified an addition no-cost project extension until December 2026. UNOPS then received a second LOA confirming their role as the sole EA with responsibility for the whole project.

The MTR considers that the original project documents, whilst very detailed, suffered from an overly complex Project structure and Results Framework with 16 outcomes and 64 indicators. Whilst the indicators were considered by the MTR to be mostly 'SMART' the number of outcomes and indicators were not considered *smart* and had a significant impact on the time taken for reporting (PIRs) and the length and complexity of these reports. The Inception Phase prepared a detailed ToC based on the endorsed Results Framework, and a reconstructed ToC was prepared for this MTR (see Section 4). The MTR suggests that the PCU review the Project Results Framework to assure the PSC that there is good alignment with the current project and to recommend any changes necessary (e.g. to accommodate the different pilots adopted by Thailand from those initial identified in the CEO Endorsement document, integrate gender relevant indicators/targets where appropriate, etc.)

The project has struggled to have an effective communication strategy without a specialist within the PCU (currently a communication expert is in the process of recruitment). This exacerbated the confused awareness that stakeholders (including national representatives) held that the 'project' was the pilots in Component 1 that was the responsibility of UNOPS. The MTR thinks that the lack of a communication officer, and SEAFDEC not having a presence within the PCU (despite the PCU being housed in SEAFDEC) increased the lack of awareness of the regional activities within Components 2 and 3.

As of December 2024, the project spend was approximately 40% of the total grant. The lack of progress is also evident from the comparison of the project 'implementation status' shown in Section 5.3.2. This is a major challenge to the PCU/EA to delivering the expected outcomes (Section 5.3.3). The MTR has identified that the PCU and the EA must expedite the remaining outputs as soon as possible and report a clear action plan to the next Project Steering Committee meeting (May 2025).

In October 2024 the project held a 'Retreat' with national and regional stakeholder to identify critical and key 'Deliverables' to achieve the goals of this project that encompassed the GEF CEO endorsed outcomes. The MTR considers this meeting to have been a turning point of the project that has focused the actions of the PCU and could provide the project with assistance to effectively communicate the priority actions to the countries providing a set of guidelines to complete the project. The Retreat identified that COBSEA was a potential key body to take over the achievements of the project and to provide long-term sustainable coordination for the SAP implementation. The MTR considers that this path provides an effective exit strategy for the project with a means to sustain the GEF investment. However, this requires that the key Deliverables identified are completed, in particular the actions on sustainable financing and grant mechanism in Component 3.

The project is failing to provide stakeholders with an up-to-date and effective communication on project activities. The MTR considers it a disadvantage that the PCU had 'UNOPS' email addresses rather than GEF specific project emails as this rather non-descript address detracts from creating a necessary project identity linked to the GEF within the region. The lack of a communications specialist/officer has been a recurring issue in this MTR that has led to poor awareness and misunderstandings from the start of the project. The MTR consultant is pleased to see that the recruitment of this expert is in progress, but there is clearly a lot of work to be done at regional and national levels. This will require quick

attention from the PCU and the country-specific knowledge that can be contributed from the National Coordinators.

Progress on dedicated outcomes on capacity building (e.g. 3.2 Capacity for civil society and community organization participation in SAP implementation strengthened via operational partnership with GEF SGP) have not been progressed yet. Outputs related to outcome 3.2 are all rated as moderately unsatisfactory in the 2024 PIR.

There is still a need for the remaining funds and activities from the UNEP/GEF Fish *Refugia* project to be transferred to the SCS-SAP project to enable these additional outputs to be integrated into the work programme.

### **The MTR review of the three project components concludes:**

**Component 1:** Three pilot countries (Cambodia, China and Thailand) are progressing well with a total of 36 pilot interventions on habitats. All three countries have reported that the national activities associated with Component 1 will be concluded by the current project end-date (December 2026). The Philippines have recently signed the agreement with UNOPS through a national NGO and work has commenced with inception meetings reported to be held in March 2025. The MTR considers that the Philippines may require a maximum 1 year no-cost extension (to December 2027) to complete the work.

Due to long and extensive negotiations on agreements, national restructuring and reorganisations of ministry structures, Indonesia and Vietnam agreements are still to be signed with the EA. The PSC, guided by the PCU, should set a clear deadline when these agreements must be finalised or the pilots cancelled, and the resources reallocated. The MTR thinks that the pilots need at least 2 years to be of benefit to the countries and in providing transferable lessons to the region to guide further SAP implementation. The MTR suggests that a deadline of August 2025 should be considered as the deadline.

Whilst there have been success with three of the pilots, it is essential the PCU should maintain a firm management on the completion of all Component 1 expected outputs and show further progress towards completion in the next PIR report.

**Component 2:** The lack of progress demonstrated by comparing output progress between the 2024 PIR and December 2004 Quarterly report is potentially concerning. However, the recent contracting of the TDA/SAP regional and national development teams give some optimism when linked to a detailed timeline developed by the TDA/SAP lead consultant. This key Deliverable is expected to be submitted for approval by a COBSEA's IGM meeting in October 2026.

In addition to the SAP update, Component 2 will also provide outputs that will contribute to the planned future 'SEA:LEARN' information system. The MTR again thinks that the PCU and relevant project teams need to maintain a close focus on the delivery of these outputs and to be able to clearly demonstrate significantly improved implementation status in forthcoming quarterly reports and PIRs. The MTR considers that TDA/SAP update will be delivered before the current planned end of the project (December 2026) but that some of the other outputs (e.g. contributing towards the SEA:LEARN 'Deliverable') may require addition time.

**Component 3:** The MTR considers the lack of demonstrable progress (see section 5.3.2 and 5.3.3) and focus on the crucial mechanisms to be developed to finance the SAP regional implementation is or concern to the MTR (following the concept note on SEA:PUFFER). This must receive high priority and attention from the PCU and the Executing Agency (UNOPS). The development of a Small Grants mechanism (or the adaption of an existing approach from the GEF SGP or IUCN) is urgently required, with the significant allocated project resources yet to be committed. Consultants or organisations need to be contracted as soon as possible and certainly by the mid-2025. The MTR considers, from discussions with national stakeholders and pilot activities, that *potential* small grant projects could be identified quickly.

Also importantly, the identification of possible long-term financing mechanisms is even more urgent for the sustainability of the project's Deliverables. Again, there has been no progress to-date. The PCU/EA must identify and recruit consultants/organisations to deliver this output urgently to ensure there is a clear recommendation by the end of the project to be passed to COBSEA to sustain both the coordination of the SAP implementation and a small grants initiative.

The lack of progress and the importance of the financing mechanism and testing an approach for a small grants programme suggests that these outputs will require an additional one year no-cost extension for completion and an effective transfer of these tools/approaches to COBSEA.

#### **Key Steps for consideration by the Project.**

1. The PCU should present the current focus on the Retreat identified 'Deliverables' to the PSC and seek the formal approval of the potential future role of COBSEA to coordinate the SAP.
2. Pilot actions - Formal decision should be taken by the PSC (May 2025) on a deadline for agreements to be signed between Indonesia and Vietnam with the Executing Agency (UNOPS). A project extension is likely for the Philippines pilots
3. SEA:LEARN - Urgent attention should be devoted to establishing and maintaining the knowledge management system that will be a key part of the future long-term sustainable governance mechanism. A project extension is likely to implement SEA:LEARN.
4. SEA:PUFFER – The main elements of this 'Deliverable' – the small grants facility and overall financing mechanism needs to be initiated as soon as possible. Consultants/organisations that can deliver this are required urgently. A project extension is likely for SEA:PUFFER.
5. Phased exit of the project/PCU – **IF** COBSEA is the preferred route for a sustainable governance mechanism to coordinate the SAP, then under the scenario of a further project extension, it could be beneficial if the COBSEA Secretariat housed the PCU (still under UNOPS as EA). The MTR does not think that the 'full' PCU would be required but the remaining work could be effectively supervised by <3 PCU staff that would also facilitate the transfer of the outputs (including tools and mechanisms for SEA:LEARN and SEA:PUFFER) to COBSEA.

6. Develop and implement a regional communication strategy (including active social media and other techniques) to inform stakeholder of the project’s achievements, outputs of meetings and route to sustainability.

**MTR’s summary conclusion:**

Whilst the Project is significantly delayed, the steps taken by the PCU, with the support of key stakeholders (from the Project Retreat), are considered by the MTR to indicate that the project could deliver the main outcomes expected, subject to specific outputs receiving a further one year no-cost extension. **However**, it is essential that the PCU provides a proactive approach to the overall management and delivery of all planned project outputs. This should include a clear workplan and timeline with monitored milestones to be developed by consultants working on Component 3 (following example of the TDA/SAP approach) and monitored by the PCU. This will require strong overall direction from the Project Manager and rapid recruitment of necessary consultants by the Executing Agency (UNOPS) for, as yet, uncontracted outputs, especially in Component 3.

Successful completion of the project is a prerequisite to the phased transfer of the results and tools to COBSEA as the potential long-term body responsible for the coordination of the SAP.

## 7 Lessons learned

<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>Importance of communication strategy and specialist to ensure good awareness and understanding of the whole project</b>
Project Context	The Project Inception Report identified that a communication strategy and an officer would be required but this has been very delayed. The issues that have arisen, for example the confusion on the project being ‘just Component 1’ identified by a number of stakeholders are considered a significant problem. The MTR also received reports that many of the national workshops/meetings are not regionally disseminated and awareness at local community level of project activities that are providing socio-economic and ecosystem benefits are could also be highly beneficial and encouraging local appreciation of the key coastal habitats with tourists and local communities. The project is in the process of recruiting a communications specialist.
Application of lesson in similar projects	Communication specialist/officer should be recruited at the start of the project (certainly within the inception phase). The Communication specialist should also update the communication strategy (developed during the project preparation) and take responsibility for planning the project website, social media etc.
<b>Lesson 2</b>	<b>Benefit of National Coordinators as part of the PCU team to ensure good interactions at all levels with country representatives</b>
Project Context	During the inception phase, the project identified importance of having National Coordinators in each of the six counties to facilitate national and regional relevant actions. The MTR considered these to be an excellent addition to the ‘extended’ PCU.

Application of lesson in similar projects	Regional projects should encourage the use of National Coordinators to both facilitate the project actions but also to assist with providing information from relevant national meetings/activities that could be of benefit to other countries in the region.
<b>Lesson 3</b>	<b>Multiple Executing Agencies</b>
Project Context	The project was designed with two EAs (UNOPS with responsibility for national activities and the PCU, and SEAFDEC with responsibilities for regional activities.). It is common for GEF projects to have multiple agencies providing their complementary comparative advantages to the project. The design of the project would have benefited from having the PCU with staff provided by both EAs to ensure that the project had a clear and integrated approach to the project components.
Application of lesson in similar projects	In designing projects, carefully consideration should be provided that all executing agencies are represented within the PCU and the project management budget (PMC) is appropriately split between EAs.

Table 9 - Summary of lessons

## 8 Recommendations

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<b>Development /update of Communication Strategy</b>
Context and Justification	With the recruitment of the project's communication specialist, it is recommended that a review of the project's current communication activities (including the project website) should be quickly undertaken. There is a significant need to provide good communications of the <i>whole</i> project's activities to the regional partners especially to reflect the conclusions of the recent Project Retreat and the focus on key Deliverables.
Responsible	PCU/EA and the project's appointed communication specialist.
Timeline	In progress/asap
<b>Recommendation 2</b>	<b>Small Grant Programme</b>
Context and Justification	The project has been planned with a regional small grants programme within Component 3. To-date there has been little work on initiating this. Options include links with the GEF SGP to manage grants or to utilise the selection criteria developed by GEF SGP or IUCN to execute a small grants programme within the SCS-SAP project. As time is <u>very</u> limited, the MTR suggests that a small grants programme could be launched quickly using available approaches and building on the current habitats pilots in the countries to support further awareness raising and socio-economic activities linked to the pilots. National authorities also have made suggestions for potential small grants on, for example, capacity building on SAP implementation for their staff.
Responsible	PCU to prepare consultant(s) ToRs to identify and facilitate initiation of a small grants programme working with national authorities, NGOs, private sector (e.g. dive shops) and communities.
Timeline	A grants programme will require at least 2 years to initiate and to deliver results. The PCU/EA will ideally need to identify potential projects to support by August 2025 and these activities would likely need to be extended beyond the current

		end date (December 2026). A-year project extension is recommended below.
<b>Recommendation 3</b>		<b>Difficulties experienced by the PCU/EA in obtaining agreements signed in Indonesia and Vietnam for project activities requires a deadline for a decision.</b>
Context and Justification		The PCU/EA have worked for several years to obtain national agreements established to undertake the planned pilot actions (as presented in the regional agreed Project Document) and relevant regional activities that will contribute to the regional sustainability of the SAP implementation coordination. However, national structural changes and government requirements have prevented this from proceeding. All four other project countries have delivered these agreements. Even with a further 1-year project extension (to December 2027) the remaining time to achieve beneficial results for countries and to contribute to regional SAP implementation lessons for the region is very limited. The Project needs to have a final agreement by an agreed date or the resources need to be reallocated to alternative activities agreed by the PSC.
Responsible		The PCU should present recommendations to the PSC on possible deadline for a decision by Indonesia /Vietnam (e.g. August 2025) and if this cannot be achieved then the PSC should identify where the resources should be reallocated.
Timeline		PSC meeting in May 2025 to set a deadline and agree way forward.
<b>Recommendation 4</b>		<b>Formal PSC decision on the project recommending COBSEA as an appropriate body to coordinate the long-term SAP implementation</b>
Context and Justification		The Project Retreat (involving representatives of COBSEA) identified COBSEA as a potential governance structure to assume the role of SAP coordinator for the SCS. The key Deliverables arising from the Retreat are directed at providing COBSEA with tools (including information systems) and outline financing mechanisms to enable small grants and regional SAP coordination activities to continue. This provides the main 'exit' strategy of the GEF SCS-SAP project.
Responsible		PSC to discuss/agree that COBSEA is an appropriate body from the SCS-SAP project perspective. The MTR assumes that a similar discussion at the next COBSEA IGM would also be required.
Timeline		The PCU to provide necessary supporting material on SAP-coordination and the role of COBSEA. This should be presented and discussed at the next Project Steering Committee meeting in May 2025.
<b>Recommendation 5</b>		<b>Project extension/phasing out of the SCS-SAP project</b>
Context and Justification		The MTR identified a number of key outputs that are unlikely to be completed by the current end-date (December 2026). These outputs include:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Component 1: Philippines pilots (and potentially those in Indonesia and Vietnam if agreements can be concluded);</li> <li>● Component 2: Finalisation of the KM/information system and inclusion of all project results for SEA:LEARN;</li> <li>● Component 3: Identification of potential financing mechanisms to sustain SAP coordination activities and support an on-going small grants programme under COBSEA. Completion of SCS-SAP small grants programme.</li> </ul> <p>An additional one- year no-cost extension is proposed until December 2027.</p> <p>The MTR is proposing that the PCU staffing level for the remaining outputs could be reduced to 2 or 3 staff who will finalise the remaining activities and act as a bridge to the COBSEA coordination role of the SAP. This would assist with the hand-over of all results of the SCS-SAP project and act as the main exit strategy for the project.</p> <p>Ideally, the remaining PCU staff (under UNOPS management) could be housed within COBSEA’s office (subject to available space) to further assist the hand-over of information.</p>
Responsible	<p>PCU, EA, UNEP, COBSEA Secretariat. PCU to document the needs and benefits of an extension and revise work programmes/budgets accordingly to present to the PSC.</p> <p>The proposed project extension should be supported by a detailed workplan developed by consultants undertaking the outputs in Components 2 and 3 and monitored by the PCU.</p>
Timeline	<p>PSC meeting in May 2025 to approve project extension. Hand-over of the project results to be subject to discussions between COBSEA Secretariat, UNEP and PCU/EA.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>To:</p>	<p><b>Updating Project Results Framework indicators/targets</b></p>
Context and Justification	<p>The Project has not made any revisions to the Results Framework since the Inception Phase. Whilst the MTR is not suggesting drastic changes to the endorsed Results Framework, the mid-term review does present an opportunity to ensure that the project is accurately presented in the Results Framework. For example, Thailand DMCR raise the issue that the pilots that were eventually implemented were not the same as defined in the Project Documents as national priorities and situations had evolved. These change, has resulted in Thailand reporting progress against indicators and targets that do not reflect the current situation.</p> <p>An update of the Results Framework would also provide the Project with an opportunity to review whole Results Framework and to introduce for example, relevant gender indicators/targets.</p>

		This revision would also presents an opportunity to review the presentation of information in the annual PIRs. For example, to consider combining multiple very similar texts to report on the key habitats under against the same outcomes.
Responsible		PCU to review Project Results Framework and recommend any modifications/additions to the PSC for approval
Timeline		Updates to be provided prior to the PSC (May 2025) for approval
<b>Recommendation 7</b>		<b>UNEP to request GEF to correct website</b>
Context and Justification		The project information on the GEF website is not the final /endorsed version of critical documents. The MTR could not find the CEO Endorsement Document and UNEP Project Document that had the correct project title (missing the 'Gulf of Thailand'). In addition, the final GEF Review sheet was not on the website (the version at PIF was available)
Responsible		UNEP to discuss with GEF Secretariat.
Timeline		As soon as possible
<b>Recommendation 8</b>		<b>Senior PCU staff should endeavour to visit at least one pilot in each country</b>
Context and Justification		Stakeholders considered it important (supported by MTR) that the PCU should visit more pilot sites to become more directly familiar with activities and results. The PCU recognise that it would be beneficial to look for synergy and opportunities to upscale. The MTR understand the demands on the PCU's time but considers they should take the opportunity during country specific meetings to visit available national sites to avoid excessive time or cost burdens.
Responsible		PCU and National Coordinators
Timeline		As soon as possible

Table 10 - Summary of recommendations

## Annex 1 – Consultants ToR for MTR



I. Post Information	
Position Title: <b>Technical Advisor -- Environmental (Mid-term Evaluation Consultant)</b> Organizational Unit: <b>GPO, GVA, Water, Environment &amp; Climate (WEC)</b> Duty Station: <b>Home-based</b> Reports to: <b>SCS-SAP Project Manager</b>	Current Grade: Proposed Grade: <b>ICS-11</b> Approved Grade: Post Classified by: Classification Approved by: Contract duration: <b>maximum 60 days</b>

II. Organizational & Project Context
<p><b>Background Information</b></p> <p><b>UNOPS Water, Environment and Climate (WEC)</b></p> <p>The Water, Environment and Climate (WEC) portfolio is part of the UNOPS Global Portfolio Office. The Portfolio has built strong partnerships and is effectively managing a portfolio of over 500 million USD over the last 15 years to support key initiatives with fund management, project implementation and administrative support.</p> <p><b>The UNEP/GEF “South China Sea -SAP Project”</b></p> <p>The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea, which supports a number of unique habitats and ecosystems that are amongst the most biologically diverse shallow water marine ecosystems globally. The richness and productivity of the South China Sea and associated environments are, however, seriously threatened by high population growth, pollution, overharvest and habitat modification, resulting in high rates of habitat loss and impairment of the regenerative capacities of living resources. The socio-economic impacts of environmental deterioration are significant for the economies of this region.</p> <p>Recognising that actions were urgently needed to halt degradation of the environment of this marine basin, the countries of the region sought the assistance of UNEP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the project “Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” was implemented from 2003-2008. This included a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis of the issues and problems and their societal root causes as the basis for development of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP)</p>

which was inter-governmentally adopted in 2008. The SAP established a series of objectives and priority costed actions for coastal habitats, land-based pollution management, and the overexploitation of fish stocks in the South China Sea

In May 2018, a US\$ 15 million grant was released by the GEF to support the execution of the 5-year “SCS-SAP Project” (2018-2023). Due to various challenges, including the COVID19 pandemic, the project has been delayed and has now been extended to December 2026. This extension was based on a revision of the project implementation modality and work plan, which were approved by the Project Steering Committee in January 2024. Based on this, the agreement between the implementing agency (UNEP) and the executing agency (UNOPS) was amended in May 2024, and the project is now finally under full implementation.

The overall objective of the SCS-SAP Project is:

To assist countries in meeting the targets of the approved Strategic Action Programme (SAP) for the marine and coastal environment of the South China Sea (SCS) through implementation of the National Action Plans in support of the SAP, and strengthening regional co-ordination for SCS SAP implementation

The project includes three interlinked components:

Component 1:

- Reducing habitat degradation and loss via national and local reforms to achieve Strategic Action Programme targets for coastal habitat management in the South China Sea

Component 2:

- Strengthening knowledge-based action planning for the management of coastal habitats and land-based pollution to reduce environmental degradation of the South China Sea

Component 3:

- Facilitating regional and national level integration and cooperation for implementation of the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme

Circumstances have changed since the start of the project more than 6 years ago. The current status of the project offers a good opportunity to review the overall achievements and whether any changes to project strategies and outputs are needed in view of the new reality since the original project document was developed. As a result of the recent project extension to 2026, the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) has recently adjusted to project work plan and strategic considerations.

This offers a good opportunity to get some external inputs as to the direction of the project for the remaining implementation period, and as the key executing partner of the Project,

the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) therefore wants to undertake a mid-term evaluation, a key requirement of GEF supported projects. For this reason, UNOPS is looking to engage the services of an independent Consultant / Evaluator to implement the Mid-Term Evaluation (MTE)

The MTE team will consist of one independent consultant with extensive experience and exposure to projects and evaluations globally.

### III. Functions / Key Results Expected

#### **Functional Responsibilities and Deliverables:**

In line with the UNEP Evaluation Policy and the UNEP Programme and Project Management Manual, the Mid-Term Review (MTE) is undertaken approximately half-way through project implementation to analyze whether the project is on-track, what problems or challenges the project is encountering, and what corrective actions are required.

Mid-Term review findings and judgements will be based on sound evidence and analysis, clearly documented in the Review Report. Information will be triangulated (i.e. verified from different sources) as far as possible, and when verification is not possible, the single source will be mentioned (whilst anonymity is still protected). Analysis leading to evaluative judgements should always be clearly spelled out.

The MTE Consultant will begin by conducting a comprehensive review of relevant project documentation and available findings and progress, including but not limited to the Project Implementation Reports, Project Document, PIF, ESSP, and reports from the Project Steering Committee, as provided by the PCU. Following this, the consultant will participate in an MTE initiation briefing to gain a clear understanding of the objectives and methodology of the evaluation. Based on the insights from this briefing, the consultant will prepare the MTE Inception Report.

As part of the MTE process, the consultant is expected to undertake an MTE mission, which will include interviews with the project team and key stakeholders, as well as potential site visits. Additionally, the consultant may deliver an oral presentation of the preliminary findings to project partners. The final deliverables will be a draft and a reviewed report that adheres to the structure and guidelines outlined in the provided evaluation guidance documents.

A Mid-Term Review is a formative assessment, which requires that the consultant(s) go beyond the assessment of “what” the project performance is and make a serious effort to provide a deeper understanding of “why” the performance is as it is.

**Attribution, Contribution and Credible Association:** In order to attribute any outcomes and impacts to a project intervention, one needs to consider the difference between what has happened with, and what would have happened without, the project (i.e. take account of changes over time and between contexts in order to isolate the effects of an intervention). This requires appropriate baseline data and the identification of a relevant counterfactual, both of which are frequently not available for reviews. Establishing the contribution made by a project in a complex change process relies heavily on prior intentionality (e.g. approved project design documentation, logical framework) and the articulation of causality (e.g. narrative and/or

illustration of the Theory of Change). Robust evidence that a project was delivered as designed and that the expected causal pathways developed supports claims of contribution and this is strengthened where an alternative theory of change can be excluded. A credible association between the implementation of a project and observed positive effects can be made where a strong causal narrative, although not explicitly articulated, can be inferred by the chronological sequence of events, active involvement of key actors and engagement in critical processes.

Partners and Key Project Stakeholders. A key aim of the Mid-Term Review is to encourage reflection and learning by UNEP and project staff, the implementing partners and key project stakeholders. The Review Consultant should consider how reflection and learning can be promoted, both through the review process and in the communication of review findings and key lessons.








In summary, the expected deliveries of the consultancy are listed as follows and are expected to comply strictly with the detailed and expanded ToR provided by the client (UNEP):


- Inception Report
- Review mission
- E-based interviews, surveys
- Presentation of preliminary findings
- Draft Report to UNEP counterpart
- Draft report with the wider group of stakeholders
- Final main review report to UNEP counterpart
- Final main review report shared with stakeholders

#### IV. Impact of Results

The MTE consultant impacts on the review of the overall achievements and recommendations to contribute to project strategies and outputs if needed, in consideration of the recent project extension to 2026, and the direction of the project in the remaining implementation period.

#### V. Competencies

	<p>Develops and implements sustainable business strategies, thinks long term and externally in order to positively shape the organization. Anticipates and perceives the impact and implications of future decisions and activities on other parts of the organization.</p>
	<p>Treats all individuals with respect; responds sensitively to differences and encourages others to do the same. Upholds organizational and ethical norms. Maintains high standards of trustworthiness. Role model for diversity and inclusion.</p>
	<p>Acts as a positive role model contributing to the team spirit. Collaborates and supports the development of others. <b>For people managers only:</b> Acts as positive leadership role model, motivates, directs and inspires others to succeed, utilising appropriate leadership styles</p>
	<p>Demonstrates understanding of the impact of own role on all partners and always puts the end beneficiary first. Builds and maintains strong external relationships and is a competent partner for others (if relevant to the role).</p>
	<p>Efficiently establishes an appropriate course of action for self and/or others to accomplish a goal. Actions lead to total task accomplishment through concern for quality in all areas. Sees opportunities and takes the initiative to act on them. Understands that responsible use of resources maximizes our impact on our beneficiaries.</p>
	<p>Open to change and flexible in a fast paced environment. Effectively adapts own approach to suit changing circumstances or requirements. Reflects on experiences and modifies own behaviour. Performance is consistent, even under pressure. Always pursues continuous improvements.</p>
	<p>Evaluates data and courses of action to reach logical, pragmatic decisions. Takes an unbiased, rational approach with calculated risks. Applies innovation and creativity to problem-solving.</p>

	<p>Expresses ideas or facts in a clear, concise and open manner. Communication indicates a consideration for the feelings and needs of others. Actively listens and proactively shares knowledge. Handles conflict effectively, by overcoming differences of opinion and finding common ground.</p>
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VI. Recruitment Qualifications	
Education:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advanced university degree (Master's degree or equivalent) in Fisheries, Marine Science, or similar</li> <li>First level university degree (Bachelor's degree or equivalent) with additional two years of experience may be accepted in lieu of an Advanced university degree.</li> </ul>
Expertise and practical work experience:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Qualifying experience in relevant technical areas for at least 7 years is required. Preferably as a marine/fisheries/environmental resources expert.</li> <li>Demonstrated knowledge of, and experience with, coastal and marine issues in a regional seas context, including in the South China Sea is required</li> <li>Experience working with the GEF or GEF-evaluations, preferable for the International Waters Focal Area is required;</li> <li>Experience of working with the UN system is required.</li> </ul>
Language Requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fluency in (written and oral) English;</li> </ul>

VII. Signatures- Post Description Certification		
Incumbent <i>(if applicable)</i>		
Name	Signature	Date
Supervisor		
Name / Title	Signature	Date
Director, Regional Office or Operations/Project Centre Manager		
Name / Title	Signature	Date

## Annex 2 – Documents Consulted

- Documents Consulted
- PIF
- CEO Endorsement Document
- UNEP Project Documents
- STAP review comments
- Inception meeting documents/Inception Report
- ToRs for lead agencies.
- PSC Meeting minutes
- PIRs
- Report on SCS team workshop ('Project Retreat') October 2024, Cambodia
- Quarterly Financial reports
- Examples of quarterly reports from pilot actions
- Co-financing reports
- Project website
- Project publications identified in PIRs
- Stakeholder lists
- Concept notes on:
  - SEA:LEARN
  - SEA:PUFFER
  - Governance

## Annex 3 - Questions for partners and stakeholder

### Mid-Term Review UNOPS/UNEP/GEF Project:

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

Please only respond to any of these questions that you think are relevant to your experience of collaborating with the project. In responding please consider what specifically was good/less effective from your experience, giving examples where possible.

1. What has been your involvement with the project development and execution?
  2. What is your perception of the interaction of the project with national stakeholders? Do you think their needs were met?
  3. How has the project interacted with other environmental actions in your country?
  4. In your view, what have been the main achievements and lessons (positive and negative) of the project? Please can you give some examples?
  5. How has the project assisted with strengthening land and coastal management? Please give some examples if possible
  6. If you attended project meetings, were these effectively organised and managed? If not, what was wrong/could have been improved?
  7. Do you think that the project has been effective in delivering the outputs you expected from this GEF grant? What has been the most and least effective from your perspective?
  8. Could you comment on relevance, timeliness and quality of the (i) workshops, (ii) training, (iii) reports, and (iv) communications (including internet based) provided by the project.
  9. Did partnerships/linkages to institutions and ministries deliver good collaboration? What was good/less good in the collaboration?
  10. In your opinion, has the PCU been effective and efficient in dealing with problems as they arose in project execution? In your opinion, were Project Inception, Project Steering Committee meetings, Technical Working Group meetings effective at guiding the project execution?
  11. Do you have any comments on the interactions between the PCU and the project National partners, or other stakeholders?
  12. What would you suggest as an appropriate sustainable mechanism for supporting the regional SAP implementation in the longer-term?
  13. How will the actions undertaken by the project be supported post-project?
- Your responses should be emailed directly to the Mid-Term Review Consultant and all comments will be kept confidential and reported anonymously where relevant to the Review.

## Annex 4 – Stakeholders involved in MTR

Name	Organisation/Function
Adisak Sontan	Project administrative support hired by DMCR
Aimee Gonzales	Executive Director, Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA)
Anders Poulsen	PCU - Senior Project Manager SCS-SAP Project
Bangon Chaiyamat	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Chanokphon Jantharakhantee -	DMCR, Thailand Director of Subdivision, Marine Resources Conservation Division
Isabelle Vanderbeck	UNEP Task Manager
Jintana Chaiyot	DMCR Regional Office 4
Kiatphoom Prabanrong	DMCR Regional Office 4
Krik Nuinoi	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Liana McManus	Regional Consultant TDA/SAP
Magarita V. Cablla	PCU - Knowledge Management Specialist SCS-SAP Project
Mahesh Pradhan	COBSEA Coordinator UNEP
Makiko Yashiro	UNEP- ROAP
Meas Rithy	Deputy Director, Department of Coastal and Marine Environment, General Directorate of Natural Protected Areas, MOE, Cambodia (NFP and RWG member)
Nguyen Le Tuan	Director, Vietnam Environment and Marine Science Institute, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
Nguyen Le Vinh	Head, Sciences and International Cooperation Department, Viet Nam Environmental and Marine Sciences Institute, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
Ob-orm Utthasit	PCU - Project Management Support - Senior Assistant SCS-SAP Project
Orapa Suwatthano	Project Management Staff-DMCR Officer
Orathai Nuinoi	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Ornuma Janyapiyapong	DMCR, Thailand - Director of Division, Foreign Affairs Division
Patcharaphan Pakdeethai	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
PEI Xiangbin	China National Coordinator, SCS-SAP Project
Phongsakorn Thongchan	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Reynaldo F Molina	PCU - Project Management Support Specialist SCS-SAP Project
Romeo Trono	Philippines National Coordinator, SCS-SAP Project
Rungrawee Jaisawang	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Saisunee Jaksuin	Project technical support hired by DMCR
Saowakon Nakkaew	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Somboon Siriraksophon	Regional Fishery Consultant (former Fish <i>Refugia</i> Project Manager)
Somsri Saisut	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Sontaya Chuarot	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District

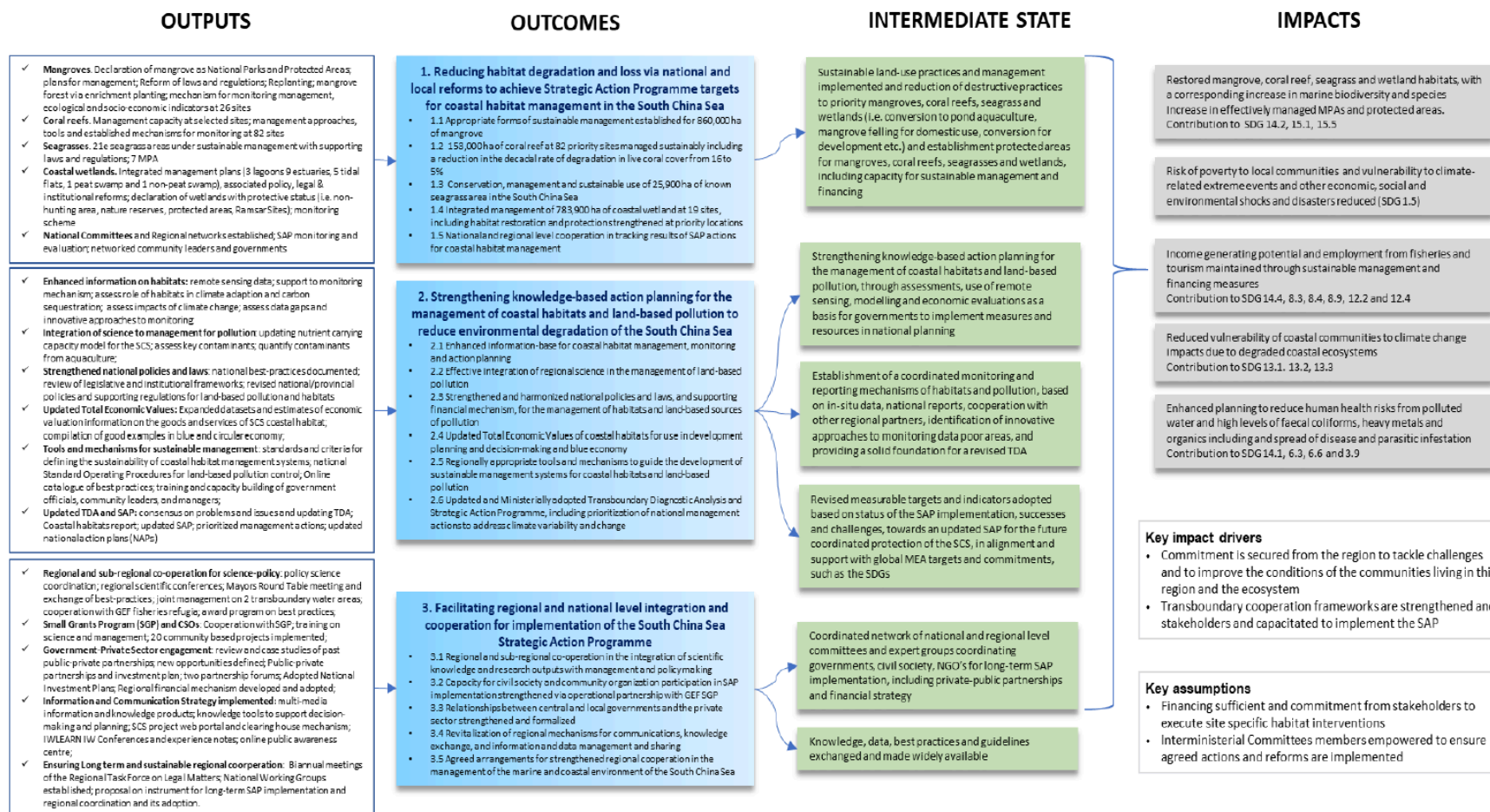
Sonthaya Suthinui	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Srey Sunleang	Director General, General Directorate of Natural Protected Areas, Ministry of Environment, Cambodia (IMC Chair, PMC member)
Surachai Nilwetch	Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers) Ban Don Han, Don Sak Subdistrict, Don Sak District
Suriyan Tunkijjanukij	Assistant Professor, Dean, Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University
<b>Suwimol Sereepaowong</b>	National Coordinator - Thailand
Than Monomoyith	<b>Vice Chief of Office, Department of Coastal and Marine Environment, General Directorate of Natural Protected Areas, MOE, Cambodia</b>
Theerapong Saepua	<b>DMCR Regional Office 4</b>
Tri Edi Kuriandewa	<b>Scientific Expert, Yayasan Lamun Indonesia (Indonesia Seagrass Foundation) Seagrasses NFP and RWG member</b>
Ukkrit Satapoomin	<b>Deputy Director General, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (IMC and NTWG Chair; PSC and RSTC Member; Coral Reef RWG Chair)</b>
Uraiporn Saepua	<b>DMCR Regional Office 4</b>
Uthen Kimtan	<b>DMCR Regional Office 4</b>
Virginie Hart	Former Project Manager
Vo Si Tuan	PCU- Regional Science Coordinator SCS-SAP Project
Wilawan Thanatemaneeerat	Environmentalist, Pollution Control Department Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand

### MTR Consultant's Schedule

Date	Time	Activity	Location	F2F/ Online
Sun 9 Feb	16.00	Arrival in Bangkok	Bangkok	
Mon 10 Feb	9.00-16.00	Meeting with PCU	Meeting Room C, UNOPS, UNESCAP	F2F
Tue 11 Feb	9.00-12.00	Meeting with UNEP ROAP	Meeting Room 09B14, 9th floor, UNEP, UNESCAP	F2F
	12.00-13.00	Catch-up lunch on COBSEA & SCS-SAP Activities for 2025		F2F
	13.00-14.:00	Meeting with COBSEA	Meeting Room 09B14, 9th floor, UNEP, UNESCAP	F2F
Wed 12 Feb		Holiday in Thailand  Calls to other country representatives (PSC, RSTC and RWGs, GEF Focal Points)	Calls to: Cambodia Indonesia Philippines Vietnam (10:00)	Online
Thur 13 Feb	10.00-11.00	Meeting with PCU at project office	PCU Office, Room 802, 8th Floor, Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University  <a href="#">Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University</a>	F2F
	11.00-12.00	Meeting with KU FF, Dr. Suriyan, Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University + Dr. Somboon + Suwimol	Room 307, 3rd floor, Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University	F2F
	12.00-13.00	Lunch	KU	
	13.30	Meeting with SG and Staff of SEAFEC (as former Executing Agency)	SEAFDEC (located within Kasetsart University)	F2F
Fri 14 Feb	08:00	PEMSEA		Online
Sat 15 Feb		Collating information – working in hotel		
Sun	14.00	Flight to Surat Thani, Don Mueang		

Date	Time	Activity	Location	F2F/ Online
16 Feb		Airport (Lion Air)		
Mon 17 Feb		Field visit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DMCR Regional Office 4</li> <li>• Lunch – with products from habitats</li> <li>• Members of the Marine Rangers Group (community volunteers)</li> </ul>	Surat Thani	F2F
Tue 18 Feb	10.40	Return to Bangkok		
Wed 19 Feb	9.00-12.00	Meeting/ debrief with PCU	UNCC, UNESCAP	F2F
	13.00	Meeting with DDG Ukkrit and staff (as Implementing Partner and as PSC/RSTC/RWG representatives)	DMCR	F2F
	18.00	Meet with Dr. Tuan (20:00)	<a href="#">Amari Bangkok Hotel</a>	
Thur 20 Feb	9.00-15.00	CMS/COBSEA/SCS SAP Seagrass Dugong Dialogue, Dr. Tuan, other regional organizations  Dr Pei – China	<a href="#">Amari Bangkok Hotel</a>	F2F
Fri 21 Feb	00.05	Return to the UK		

## Annex 5 – SCS-SAP Inception Report ToC



## Annex 6 - Output progress

Component No	Output/Activity	Implementation status % (reported 2024 PIR <sup>6</sup> )	PIR (24) Rating	PCU Estimated Status (Dec 24)
1	1.1.1 Declaration of 57,400 ha of mangrove as National Parks and Protected Areas	60	S	60
1	1.1.2 Designation and plans for the management of 166,600 ha of mangrove as non-conversion, sustainable use areas	61	S	67
1	1.1.3 Reform of laws and regulations for the sustainable use of 602,800 ha of mangrove forest	34	S	36.5
1	1.1.4 Replanting of 21,000 ha of deforested mangrove land	86	S	87.2
1	1.1.5 Biodiversity increased for 11,200 ha of mangrove forest via enrichment planting	52	S	53
1	1.1.6 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 26 sites [based on SAP results framework]	41	S	48
1	1.2.1 Management capacity (number/levels human resources, facilities and equipment, and sustainable financing mechanisms) built for 46 coral reef sites	58	S	67
1	1.2.2 Management approaches and policy, legal & institutional reforms (integrated, community-based, multiple use) improved at 46 coral reef sites	54	S	59.1
1	1.2.3 Management tools (licensing and permit systems, seasonal closures, zoning) developed and utilized to address key threats at priority sites	57	S	63.5
1	1.2.4 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 46 sites [based on SAP results framework]	54	S	61.3
1	1.3.1 Twenty-one seagrass areas totaling 15,848 ha under sustainable management with supporting laws and regulations	94	S	91.1
1	1.3.2 Amended management plans for 7 existing MPAs with significant seagrass areas, to include specific seagrass-related management actions and policy, legal & institutional reforms	84	S	98.6
1	1.3.3 Designation of 7 new Marine Protected Areas focusing on seagrass areas identified in the prioritized listings of the SCS Project	80	S	87.1
1	1.3.4 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 20 sites [based on SAP results framework]	45	S	48.5
1	1.4.1 Integrated management plans developed and under implementation for at least 3 lagoons 9 estuaries, 5 tidal flats, 1 peat swamp and 1 non-peat swamp and associated policy, legal & institutional reforms	44	S	47.8
1	1.4.2 Declaration of at least 7 wetland areas with protection status (i.e. non-hunting area, nature reserves, protected areas, Ramsar Sites).	36	S	45.5
1	1.4.3 Adoption of a regional estuary monitoring scheme and its national implementation [based on SAP results framework]	31	S	38
1	1.5.1 National committees and regional networks of habitat specialists established under the SCS project revitalized and functioning	50	S	50
1	1.5.2 Mechanism to monitor and evaluate the impacts of SAP implementation and achievement of habitat targets operational [including agreement on standardized methods and guidelines for inventory and assessment]	50	S	50

<sup>6</sup> Previous PIR (2023) indicated zero progress

Comp onent No	Output/Activity	Implementation status % (reported 2024 PIR <sup>6</sup> )	PIR (24) Rating	PCU Estimated Status (Dec 24)
1	1.5.3 Community leaders and local government from priority habitat sites networked via national and regional round-table meetings to foster cooperation and knowledge sharing on achievements and best practices	25	S	25
1	1.5.4 Progress and status report of regional and national SAP implementation	50	S	50
2	2.1.1. Assessment of existing data and information on coastal habitat in the South China Sea, and review of monitoring and assessment approaches that can support SCS monitoring program, from national, regional and global sources, combined with project-generated data from Component 1	5	MU	10
2	2.1.2 Mechanism for collection and exchange of regional coastal habitat and pollution information and data established	10	MU	10
2	2.1.3 Roles of coastal habitats for blue economy development in the South China Sea, and assessment of data/information needs for the blue economy	10	MU	15
2	2.1.4 Review of status and potential of blue economy in the region and linkages to coastal ecosystems	10	MU	10
2	2.2.1 Updating the current scientific data and information on marine land based pollution for SCS marine basin	15	MU	15
2	2.2.2. Regional level assessment of sources, flows, and impacts of marine pollution (incl. from coastal aquaculture): Support national surveys using recommended approaches and applying training to establish baselines and inform a regional assessment	15	MU	15
2	2.2.3. Quantification of effluent volumes and contaminant loadings from coastal aquaculture to the SCS marine basin	15	MU	15
2	2.3.1. National best practices in waste water management, law enforcement, and community and industry participation in managing land-based sources of pollution and habitat management documented and shared	40	MS	50
2	2.3.2 Review of legislative and institutional frameworks for land-based pollution and habitat management in participating countries	35	MS	35
2	2.3.3 Key principles agreed for harmonized national procedures for land-based pollution management	15	MU	15
2	2.3.4. Support to countries in revising national/provincial policies and supporting regulations for land-based pollution and habitats	15	MS	15
2	2.4.1 Expanded datasets and estimates of economic valuation information on the goods and services of SCS coastal habitats	10	MU	10
2	2.4.2. Compilation of good examples, and identify recommendations to strengthen a blue economy (and circular economy) approach and innovative financing for pollution and habitat management	15	MU	15
2	2.5.1. Online catalogue of best practice management measures and technologies for sustainable use of SCS coastal habitats and land-based pollution management	50	MU	65
2	2.5.2 Government officials, community leaders, and habitat and pollution managers exposed to on-going practices in rehabilitation, management, and pollution control and treatment via programme of training, study tours and exchange	5	MU	5
2	2.6.1 National and regional level consensus on contemporary issues and problems and updated TDA	10	MU	25
2	2.6.2. SCS State of Coastal Habitats report in line with global commitments (SDGs, CBD)	5	MU	5
2	2.6.3 National and regional consultative process to develop updated Strategic Action Programme SAP for adoption at the Project Steering	15	MU	15

Component No	Output/Activity	Implementation status % (reported 2024 PIR <sup>6</sup> )	PIR (24) Rating	PCU Estimated Status (Dec 24)
	Committee, COBSEA IGM, and for consideration at the Ministerial level including agreed monitoring and reporting mechanisms			
2	2.6.4 Prioritization of national management actions for incorporation into national policies and plans, in particular for climate variability and change and blue economy	5	MU	5
2	2.6.5 Updated and adopted National Action Plans for mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass and wetlands, and land-based pollution including enactment of supporting legislation where required	5	MU	5
3	3.1.1 Regional Scientific and Technical Committee of the SCS project functioning as a bridge between the scientific community and decision-makers [annual meetings]	25	S	25
3	3.1.2 Knowledge exchanges between government and scientific community through Regional Scientific Conferences	15	S	15
3	3.1.3 Best practice exchanges between local government officials and coastal managers on science-based management via annual Mayor's Round-Table meetings	15	S	15
3	3.1.4 Memoranda of Agreement for joint management of 2 priority transboundary water areas agreed & implemented	5	MU	15
3	3.1.5 Integration of the GEF/UNEP fisheries refugia project results in TDA and SAP updating	35	MS	35
3	3.1.6 Operational award program on best practices in coastal habitat and land-based pollution management for communities, local governments and industry [annual]	5	MU	5
3	3.2.1 Cooperation with GEF SGP in the commissioning and implementation of an additional [#] of community-based projects for SAP implementation	20	MU	20
3	3.2.2 CSO & CO inputs elicited for planning and M&E of the SCS-SGP partnership via annual NGO forums	5	MU	5
3	3.2.3 Training program on science and management of SCS coastal habitats and resources for SGP proponents	5	MU	5
3	3.3.1 Review of current Blue Economy examples from the SCS region with private sector engagement as part of blue economy strategies	20	MU	20
3	3.3.2 Identification of blue economy and blue finance opportunities for private sector investment (e.g. fisheries, tourism, others) in implementation of the updated SAP	5	MU	5
3	3.3.3 Public-private partnerships and investment plan for the implementation of the updated SAP solidified through two partnership forums to facilitate	5	MU	5
3	3.3.4. Updated and adopted National Investment Plans for land-based pollution and habitat management in the SCS [Yr 5]	5	MU	5
3	3.3.5. Identification of options for regional financial mechanism for land-based pollution and habitat management	5	MU	5
3	3.4.1 A variety of multi-media information and knowledge products based on SCS SAP implementation communications strategy	10	MS	10
3	3.4.2 Regionally appropriate knowledge tools developed to support decision-making and planning.	10	MS	10
3	3.4.3 The SCS project web portal and clearing house mechanism and associated regional databases online, updated and linked to IW-Learn and other GEF Knowledge management systems	25	S	25
3	3.4.4 Active engagement with GEF IW:LEARN [1% of project resources] including participation in IW conferences and 3 experience notes	20	S	30
3	3.5.1 Biannual meetings of the Regional Task Force on Legal Matters.	5	MU	5
3	3.5.2 National Working Groups established and functional.	15	MU	15

Component No	Output/Activity	Implementation status % (reported 2024 PIR <sup>6</sup> )	PIR (24) Rating	PCU Estimated Status (Dec 24)
3	3.5.3 Options for future regional cooperation and governance identified	0	MU	0
3	3.5.4 National stakeholder inputs to drafting of instrument for strengthened regional cooperation facilitated via national consultations	0	MU	0
3	3.5.5 Options paper on future regional cooperation and governance endorsed by countries	0	MU	0

## Annex 7 – Summary of Component Expenditure and Cofinancing

<b>1. Component</b>	<b>2. Budget (CEO) 3. USD</b>	<b>4. Budget (Inception/PSC1) 5. USD</b>	<b>6. Budget 7. (PSC2) 8. USD</b>	<b>9. Expendit 10. (Q4 202 11. USD</b>
<b>12. 1</b>	13. 7,250,000	14. 6,519,807	15. 6,554,568	16. 2,939,4
<b>17. 2</b>	18. 3,530,000	19. 3,246,355	20. 3,370,085	21. 1,398,0
<b>22. 3</b>	23. 3,500,000	24. 4,227,446	25. 4,123,594	26. 976,41
<b>27. PMC</b>	28. 720,000	29. 720,001	30. 694,783	31. 309,61
<b>32. M&amp;E</b>	<b>33.</b>	34. 286,391	35. 256,970	<b>36. 110,50</b>
<b>37. Total</b>	<b>38. 15,000,00 0</b>	<b>39. 15,000,000</b>	<b>40. 15,000,00 0</b>	<b>41. 5,734,0</b>

Reported co-financing (at the project level): 92.197 M USD This is composed of 91,486,665 USD in-kind contribution and 710,818 USD cash contribution. (the anticipated cofinancing at CEO Endorsement was 83,451,948 USD in-kind)

## Annex 8 Brief CV of MTR Consultants

**Dr Peter Whalley** is a physical chemist who has been working in water and environment management for over 30 years. He has extensive experience of developing appropriate water monitoring networks, nutrient management plans, implementing training programmes and providing trans-boundary support in a range of countries. He has been involved with the development, implementation and compliance checking of the EU Water Framework Directive. For the last twenty years he has worked on over 30 GEF funded International Waters projects.

These include technical/project management roles: the Danube Regional Project, Tisza River integrated land-water management, Lake Prespa Strategic Action Programme (SAP), Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem SAP, Amazon, Nubian Aquifer SAP. In addition, he has assisted with project preparation (development of project documents) and, mid-term and terminal evaluations for a for IW, BD and multi-focal area projects for UNDP, UNEP, IDB and the World Bank. He has also been a part of the team evaluating the global and regional UNDP Human Development Reports taking the lead on relevant reports relating to water and climate change. He was also involved for four years assisting UNDP IEO to perform quality assurance checks on terminal evaluations. Specifically, he has been involved in evaluations for GEF International Waters and the Biodiversity Focal Areas including: UNDP Orange River, UNEP/LOICZ Target Research Project, UNEP IWCAM (Caribbean), UNEP/UNDP Pacific IWRM, UNEP Amazon, UNEP Upper Yangtze Biodiversity, UNEP Amazon, UNDP Albania, UNDP Chu Talas River, Marine Protected Areas, UNEP TWAP, UNEP Floods and Drought, UNDP Kura River Basin, UNEP Fish *Refugia*, UNEP INMS

## Annex 9 Response to comments on the draft MTR