



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

First Meeting of the SCS SAP Regional Working Group on Seagrass

Teleconference, 3 December 2021

REPORT OF THE MEETING



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1. Opening of the Meeting

1.1 Welcome Address

1. Dr. Virginie Hart, SCS SAP Senior Project Manager, welcomed all the participants to the First Regional Working Group Meeting on Seagrass of the SCS SAP Project which is funded by the Global Environment Facility and executed by the United Nations Office for Project Operations and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center. The background of the SCS SAP Project and the Regional Working Group were briefly presented, which was established in the first SCS Project. The priority of the meeting was to revitalize the working group which would be the essential technical team to monitor and lead all the activities on the habitat management and restoration, development and revision of national reports, TDA and SAP, and to ensure the execution of activities at the national level. She thanked the participants especially those who attended the two previous working group meetings and hoped that the participants will ensure synergies between the working groups. She looked forward to the active participation and dynamic discussions of the working group members and hoped to have a face to face meeting in the future.

2. Mr. Isara Chanrachkij, Head of the Project Planning and Management Division of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center, gave the welcome statement on behalf of Ms. Malinee Smithithee, SEAFDEC Secretary General and Chief of the Training Department. He stressed the importance of seagrass habitat whose areas are reducing annually due to natural and man-made activities. Seagrass habitat protection has become a global concern by many institutions and agencies. The meeting is very important to initiate the project implementation as well as to exchange information and experiences among seagrass colleagues and experts for better development of conservation activities in each country in order to sustain seagrass habitat in the region. SEAFDEC is one of the Executing Agencies of the project that is responsible for regional activities and hosting the Project Coordination Unit (PCU). SEAFDEC welcomes and supports the project by linking the environment and fisheries components. He thanked everyone for participating in the meeting and looked forward to receiving the fruitful result of the meeting which would be the first step to develop activities for implementation to sustain seagrass habitat in the future.

1.2 Introduction of Members

3. Mr. Reynaldo Molina of the Project Coordination Unit introduced the members of the Regional Working Group on Seagrass from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. There was no representative from Viet Nam. He also introduced the national lead agencies and project teams and experts including representatives from other regional organizations and initiatives. The participant list is attached as Annex 1 of this report.

2. Organization of the Meeting

2.1 Designation of Officers

4. The draft rules of procedure for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass (RWG-SG) requires the election of a Chairperson, Vice-Chair and Rapporteur. The membership of the RWG-SG will be formally established at the first meeting of the working group, which will elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chair from among its members. The Chairperson of the RWG-SG will represent the RWG-SG on the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) and will attend the meetings of that Committee. The Vice-Chair shall act as Chairperson of meetings in the absence of the Chairperson.

5. The RWG-SG members were invited to elect a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson. There was no Rapporteur elected since the meeting was online and being recorded. Following deliberation, Mr. Datu Tungko Saikol, Focal Point for Seagrass in the Philippines and Mr. Tri Edi Kuriandewa, Focal Point for Seagrass in Indonesia were elected as Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson, respectively.

2.2 Organization of Work

6. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to brief the participants on the proposed organization of work of the meeting. Dr. Virginie Hart presented the summary facts of the project, which includes the background and objectives, components and outputs of the project. The project covers an integrated approach on dealing with issues on habitats and pollution, capacity building, monitoring, policy and legislation reforms, sustainable financing, small grants and other parallel issues. The meeting focused on Component 1 through Outcome 1.3 which is conservation, management and sustainable use of 26,036 ha of known seagrass area in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand, with four key outputs. There are other activities related to seagrass that are coordinated at the regional level under Components 2 and 3 that are link with the national activities.

7. According to the Terms of Reference of the Regional Working Group on Seagrass (RWG-SG), adopted at the 1st Project Steering, the purpose of RWG-SG has the responsibility “for coordinating the work of the National Seagrass Committees established in each of the participating countries; for ensuring effective implementation of project activities undertaken in the context of the achievement of the seagrass management targets of the project; and to provide a mechanism for exchange of information and experience of seagrass management activities in each country”.

8. The objectives of this First Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Seagrass were to: present and discuss the SAP targets for seagrass, and selected sites; present the compiled information provided on the status of SAP implementation between 2008-2020, which will be further developed into a publication in 2022; present the compiled information extracted on the NIRs including best practices, next steps and recommendations from the participants. To access the organization of work presentation, please click [[LINK](#)].

3. Adoption of the Meeting Agenda

9. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the draft annotated agenda and list of documents prepared as document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/2, and invited members of the RWG-SG for comments and consideration including any additional agenda that could be considered. Dr. Virginie Hart presented the document, highlighting some adjustments including items to be added under Agenda 10 Any Other Business. With no further comments, the RWG-SG

members agreed and adopted the agenda. The annotated agenda is attached as Annex 2 of this report.

4. Consideration of the Terms of Reference of the Regional Working Group

10. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/3: Provisional Terms of Reference for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project”. Dr. Virginie Hart presented the document based on the terms of reference of first SCS project working group, which was presented in the Steering Committee meeting in June 2021. The recommendations and suggestions of the previous working group meetings were also presented to ensure that all changes are aligned with the other working groups particularly on rewording the name “National Seagrass Committee” to “National Seagrass Committee/Working Group” to have some flexibility as some countries have different procedure in establishing committee and working group. The document was presented section by section.

11. There was a proposal to consider the suggestions made in the previous working group meetings for the TOR for the RWG-SG. In Section 4.1 Meeting of the Committee, there was no timeframe indicated as observed in the previous meetings. It was suggested to have two meetings per year, where one meeting could be conducted online if required. The timeframe will not be reflected in the TOR and instead be added in the meeting workplan. The last sentence of Section 4.1 needs to be updated as the draft TOR was based on the original TOR.

12. Following deliberations, the RWG-SG members agreed to revise and fine tune the draft TOR based on the discussions and suggestions and will be shared with track changes to the members after the meeting, for final adoption by silence procedure. The revised terms of reference is attached as Annex 3 of this report.

5. Review of SAP Targets for Seagrass Focal Area

13. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the review on the SAP targets on seagrass including the objectives and outputs of the SCS SAP project. Dr. Vo Si Tuan presented the review of SAP targets developed and adopted in 2008 including an overview of the SCS SAP project. Accordingly, many activities were implemented at national level to support the SAP and national action plans including developing a proposal to support the SAP implementation which was approved in 2016 by the GEF. During the inception phase period, the revisions of project targets were made due to the non-participation of Malaysia including the activities for implementation at regional and national levels. The SAP targets for seagrass focused on Outcome 1.3 on the conservation and sustainable use of 26,036 ha of seagrass areas in the six participating countries, to be achieved through four regional outputs. A total of 20 priority sites were identified in the SAP excluding Thailand with no site proposed.

6. SAP Evaluation at the National Level During 2008 – 2020

14. Dr. Vo Si Tuan presented the evaluation of SAP implementations of the seagrass focal area during 2008-2021. The purpose of the evaluation was to provide evidences on proactive contribution of the participating countries in the implementation of the SAP and their national action plans. Based on the evaluation, countries can calculate their co-financing contribution as well as provide updated baseline for developing relevant activities for the SAP SCS Project. The evaluation can help adjusting targets and outputs at the national level. Moreover, the

evaluation will be elaborated into a publication in 2022 to show the country efforts in the management of seagrass in the South China Sea.

15. The presentation was based on the submitted National Implementing Reports from Cambodia, Philippines and Thailand. There was no information from China, Indonesia and Viet Nam since they have not yet submitted their national implementation reports. A summary of key achievement from 2008 to 2021 was also presented using Cambodia as example, based on the national implementation report. The SAP implementation evaluation template was shared earlier with the countries for inputs. The evaluation is very important in developing the activities and targets for the next 2 years and in elaborating for publication the countries support to SAP implementation in the last decade.

16. A concerns raised were the limited time to gather data and the unavailability of data and information of some sites which are necessary to complete the national implementation reports and evaluation document. Dr. Vo Si Tuan clarified that the evaluation covers the SAP targets and sites, and the new targets and sites for the SCS SAP implementation. In doing the evaluation, countries can leave the evaluation table empty for sites with poor data and provide some explanations on site issues and activities including recommendations to address it. The importance of establishing the national committee or working group was stressed to engage the different sectors and organizations including universities to work and get the needed information. It was also clarified that in the review of past activities, any related activities that have been implemented in the SAP sites including new sites with funding from other sources can be counted as co-finance.

17. Dr. Virginie clarified that the SAP evaluation template was designed to help countries to complete the information which will be more on qualitative data and assessment. The SAP evaluation document will be used as basis for publication which will be presented to GEF Secretariat who have been funding SAP projects, and would like to see the progress of SAP implementation. Based on the country presentations, there have been a huge achievements in implementing the SAP at national and site level. In terms of SAP targets, the methodology in updating the national seagrass report will be discussed in the next meeting, which will provide more quantitative data.

7. Reviews and Revision of SAP Targets at the National Level

18. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to introduce document SCSSAP RWG SG.1/5 SAP Implementation of the Seagrass Focal Area (2021-2023). Dr. Virginie Hart presented the rationale of the document and the need to revise and finalize the targets and sites that will be included in the National Implementation Reports (NIRs), which will be the basis for cooperation agreement between UNOPS and SEAs. The document is a working draft that includes information from the NIRs, to be finalized once all NIR are completed.

19. As to the progress of the NIRs, Cambodia, Philippines and Thailand are well advanced with sites and targets, draft activities, workplans and budget. These countries were supported by UNOPS in terms of funding and consultancy support. China is under preparation with site visits and information gathering completed. Indonesia is under preparation with SEAs already identified to work on the NIRs. Viet Nam is still under preparation.

20. Some points were highlighted for consideration of the RWG-SG members such as the adoption of the steering committee of the project's one year extension until June 2024, which requires completion of all on the ground activities by end of 2023. Therefore, there is an urgent need to complete the minimum information of the NIRs like sites, targets, activities, budget and workplans as they will be included in the project cooperation agreement to be finalized and signed by early 2022 to start national execution. A guidance document on the NIR development was developed and presented at the third inception phase meeting in March 2021 to assist and guide the countries. The guidance document will be shared after the meeting as some of the participants have not yet been involved with the project. The project will exercise an adoptive approach in the execution of activities wherein revisions of targets and budgets during execution will be allowed. At the moment, it is important to have the indicative minimum information (sites, targets, activities, budget and workplan) available and finalize for the project cooperation agreement. The RWG-SG was encouraged to discuss and fast track the process of completing the minimum information of the NIRs. The document RWG-SG1/5 SAP Implementation report needs to be completed by the end of 2021. Overall, the design of activities is not consistent across countries submission. The RWG-SG needs to review and design actions that lead to the achievement of the outcomes and outputs, addresses the gaps and needs identified in the national reports and baselines, and long term sustainability of actions and activities beyond project life. The RWG-SG was encouraged to inform the PCU of any additional project support needed by the group.

21. Dr. Virginie Hart presented in details the SAP implementation document and the information needed using Cambodia as example. These include the different regional outputs of the project, the proposed original and SCS SAP sites including indicative targets, the status and justification of proposed sites, and summary of planned activities per site including cross-cutting activities. The document will help countries in the further development and completion of the national implementation report, and provide an opportunity for all countries to know each other plans and activities which may be useful for coordination and exchanges between countries and sites such as site visits, capacity building and training. The RWG-SG members were requested to review and complete the missing information. To access the SAP implementation document (2021-2023), please click [[LINK](#)].

22. An inquiry was raised concerning the internal coordination and arrangement between national agencies. Apparently, there was no consultation conducted with the fisheries agency with regard to the selection of seagrass site, considering that the sites selected are marine fisheries management area and community fisheries area, managed by the fisheries agency. Dr. Virginie Hart noted and clarified that the selection of sites may have been based on the NIR guidance document to consider and combining sites with the Fisheries Refugia Project.

8. National Presentations on SAP Implementation and Future Planning

8.1. National Presentations on SAP Implementation

23. The Chairperson invited the National Seagrass Focal Points and representatives from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand to present key achievement in SAP implementation between 2008-2021 including the current status of consultations towards the revision of national targets and sites and NIRs. There was no representative from Viet Nam.

24. Mr. Khy Ann of the Ministry of Environment of Cambodia presented the SAP implementation achievements in Cambodia. These include the issuance of regulation to create

Marine Fisheries Management Area including establishment of Marine Park and National Committee for coastal areas development and management. All the coastal provinces have 5-year development plan. Two seagrass areas have been selected as SCS SAP implementation sites with boundaries demarcated to manage and protect the seagrass areas against illegal fishing activities. In terms of achieving the SAP targets, a total of 11,446 ha of seagrass beds were under sustainable use and management. Two sites were MPAs with management plans while one site is being established as new MPA. In the implementation of SAP, several best practices and lessons learned were identified for replication such as the laws and regulations to support the protection and management of seagrass areas including the support from all concerned stakeholders at national level, provincial levels, local authorities and coastal communities. The establishment and recognition of the communities of fisheries and the communities of protected areas for management of coastal resources such as seagrass, and establishment and promotion of marine park and marine fisheries management area. The gaps and challenges to achieve long-term sustainability of actions include the lack of clear policies and regulations on seagrass management, the limited budget and equipment to support seagrass activities including the limited knowledge and experiences on seagrass.

25. In terms of project implementation, several consultations and site visits were conducted to collect data in the coastal area of Kampot province. Activities will focus on capacity building to support stakeholders and coastal communities on seagrass protection and management including preparation of seagrass management plans and workplans including monitoring and demarcation of seagrass areas. As a final consideration in the implementation of the project, there is a need to mainstream the seagrass protection and management plan into all levels of planning (national, provincial, district, commune and coastal community level) with a clear strategy for implementation. Establishment of research and monitoring facilities to monitor seagrass status can support conservation and management. The increase awareness of managers and communities on the ecological roles and economic values of seagrass can help realize the balance between utilization and conservation of seagrass resources. There is a need to build cross-sectoral capacity for sustainable seagrass management at national, provincial and local levels. To access Cambodia's presentation, please click [[LINK](#)].

26. Ms. Sui Haozhi of the South China Institute of Environmental Sciences of the Ministry of Ecology and Environment presented the distribution, status, and restoration progress of seagrass in China. A total of 23,000 ha of seagrass area in China, of which 41% is distributed in South of China, mainly in Hainan, Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. About 700 ha are prioritized for SCS SAP project. There are 22 species of seagrass in China, which is about 30 percent of seagrass species in the world. There were 46 national and provincial marine protected areas but only three MPAs (two national and one country-level) were designated for seagrass with a total area of 409 ha. From 2008 to 2021, the seagrass areas in China have increased due to newly discovered seagrass sites and measures to protect seagrass areas. However these areas are challenged by dredging, fishing and aquaculture activities. In 2017, China issued a guideline on ecological red line which specifies control measure for seagrass ecological red line area and has carried out seagrass restoration works in these areas. In 2008, there were only three institutions working on seagrass. Now, there are about 13 national and provincial research institutions working on seagrass ecosystem and restoration.

27. In terms of seagrass management plans, China intends to: continue to establish regulations on Administration for Seagrass Protection, making the protection legally enforceable; strengthen public awareness of protecting seagrass system through public service announcement; and control of human activities. This is necessary to support scientific research

on seagrass and conduct experiments on artificial restoration and exploring the feasibility of natural restoration including improving and updating seagrass database and information regularly. To access the China's presentation, please click [\[LINK\]](#).

28. Mr. Tri Edi Kuriandewa, SEA Seagrass National Focal Point of Indonesia presented the status of SAP implementation achievements at local level particularly in East Bintan. These include the establishment of the East Bintan Collaborative Management Board including the issuance of Decree No. 257/VI/2010 declaring all seagrass in coastal area of East Bintan as conservation area and Dugong as marine protected animal. Approximately, 2,600 ha of seagrass area with 10 species of 13 species that were recorded in Indonesian were declared as conservation area. Four Village Information Centers were established and still active. In order to assist local government to improve coastal ecosystem in sustainable manner, three important plans were developed such as the East Bintan Coastal Resources Management Plan, East Bintan Coastal Area and Zoning Plan, and Sustainable Tourism Spatial Plan. At the national level, based on research on seagrass ecology under the SCS Project, significant results achieved were the National Conservation Strategy for Dugong in Indonesia, the Strategy and Action Plan on Seagrass Conservation, and the revision of Government Regulation No.19/Year 1999 concerning marine pollution and degradation. In terms of best practices, the preparation and implementation phase was the key success to implement the program with full time, skilful, and professional staff in project site and implementing unit. Seagrass conservation should be implemented not only through community-based management but should also be based on scientific approach. In establishing the area conservation, options based on scientific approach should only be proposed or suggested and let the community board decide. National or local political dynamics should be considered as it will influence the sustainability of the project.

29. In terms of project implementation, initial consultations were made with the national lead agency about the project and requirements since the SEA has just been designated in November 2021. The site selected to implement the project is East Bintan being the first seagrass demonstration site in Indonesia. The site is a significant transboundary area since it is located in the South China Sea and bordering two countries, and a significant marine animals migration routes. Threats identified in the site include land base pollution and illegal sand mining, development of resorts due to fast growing tourism industry causing the decrease of the quality and quantity of seagrass ecosystem, shipping activities in certain season which disturb the coastal ecosystem, and the lack of knowledge and information on seagrass of the community in all levels has led to the lack of awareness on the important role of seagrass ecosystem. Three main activities were proposed to be implemented which include the strengthening of the management of seagrass and associated biota, raising awareness and capacity building for coastal community especially young generation, and promoting sustainable economic leverage activities through alternative income generation in effective and efficient manner. As a final consideration in implementing the project, the preparation phase of the project was highlighted as key to success before deciding on the project site. Preparation phase activities include the gathering of data and information of the proposed management site especially geographical, demographical, ecological, biological and current management status to help guide and decide on the selection of sites. Personal approach to key personnel of local authority at all levels should be made to convince and obtain political, financial and substantial support to ensure successful implementation and sustainability of the project. To access the Indonesia's presentation, please click [\[LINK\]](#).

30. Mr. John Michael Cornito of the Biodiversity Management Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources presented the status and updates of the seagrass

component of the SCS SAP project on behalf of the Philippine Seagrass National Focal Point. Among the notable achievements in the implementation of the SAP is the institutionalization of the Coastal and Marine Ecosystems Management Program through DAO 2016-26 and the expansion of the coverage of Marine Protected Areas under the National Integrated Protected Areas System through the Republic Act 11038. There are still seagrass areas that are not yet part of NIPAS, and the management interventions of the Department and Bureau are still limited outside the MPAs. The implementation of SCS SAP is expected to complement the efforts in ensuring that seagrass habitats are conserved and protected, and in securing the ecosystem services that this habitat provides to coastal communities. Five seagrass sites have been identified for the implementation of the SCS SAP project with a total area of 3,357.96 ha, two of which are designated as marine protected areas under the NIPAS – El Nido and Masinloc sites. The other identified sites are outside legislated MPAs and are being managed by the respective local government. Some of the best practices identified include the implementation of seasonal closure for fishing activities to maintain and ensure the conservation of fish Stocks, the participation of selected sites in the established Marine Protected Area networks, which were initiated and managed by respective local government units, and the strong collaboration between the national and local governments with their key stakeholders in the implementation of various programs. Notable challenges identified were the: lack of strong policy governing the conservation and protection of seagrass ecosystems. A specific policy for seagrass ecosystem may provide a stronger foundation for the sustainable management and regulation of seagrass habitats; lack of cooperation of some local government units in the implementation of environment related programs; lack of personnel with expertise in seagrass and coastal and marine in DENR field offices; presence of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing activities and other threats; accumulation of marine litter in seagrass beds; and the planting of mangroves over seagrass beds to promote coastal protection from any natural catastrophic events, which needs to be corrected to protect the dwindling seagrass populations of the country.

31. In terms of project implementation, national consultations were conducted online to discuss the preparation and finalization of the national implementation report which includes the confirmation of identified sites, the gathering of initial site information and identify initial activities to be executed including soliciting comments and recommendations to ensure smooth implementation of the project. For the site selection, some sites were dropped due to factors that may affect the implementation of the project. The proposed seagrass sites are: Cape Bolinao in Pangasinan, Masinloc Oyon Bay Protected Landscape and Seascape in Zambales, Looc and Lubang in Occidental Mindoro, and El Nido in Palawan. Based on national consultations, the proposed activities to be undertaken include the updating of the protected area management plans for areas designated as marine protected area and preparation of management plans for non-protected areas including updating of Local Government Unit based policies as legal basis for the protection and conservation of seagrass habitat. Another is the periodic monitoring of seagrass sites including installation of monitoring markers. This activity will be in conjunction with the water quality monitoring activities to correlate the water quality results with the current status and condition of the seagrass sites. Capacity building activities will also be conducted for local stakeholders and Department personnel including production of communication, education and public awareness materials. The final consideration in the implementation of the project is the possibility of extending the field implementation duration due to the CoVID-19 pandemic and lockdown restrictions may affect the timely delivery of the project targets and objectives. Moreover, lasting and sustainable change will be achieved through an extensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism as well as a thorough communication, education and public awareness activities to effect social and behavior change

towards conservation and protection of seagrass habitats. To access the Philippines's presentation, please click [[LINK](#)].

32. Mrs. Natthawadee Bantiwiwatkul of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, on behalf of Thailand Seagrass National Focal Point, presented the general data and management on seagrass beds in Thailand since there was no seagrass targets identified for SAP implementation. A total of 18 major sites of seagrass beds with an area of about 7,200 ha in the Gulf of Thailand are currently under research, monitoring and management scheme of the Department of Marine and Coastal Resources. The major sites of seagrass beds in Thailand are Trat, Chanthaburi, Surat Thani, Chumphon, and Pattani provinces. Activities conducted include seagrass habitats mapping including status assessment and monitoring of all sites done every 4 years, conduct research on rehabilitation through transplantation technique and carbon sequestration, conduct routine surveillance and law enforcement on illegal fishing practices (push nets and trawling) at all sites through the Office of Marine and Coastal Resources Administration. Several management plans of MPAs were amended such as the inclusion of seagrass bed at Thungka Bay within the Mo Ku Chumphon National Park (MPA) under the authority of the Department of National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation. The Park has established conservation measures to retain primitive condition of the seagrass bed. The seagrass beds at Samui Island and Pha-ngan Island were designated within the Environmental Protection Area of Surat Thani Province. Protection measures for seagrass beds in the area were prescribed. Relevant conservation and management measures for seagrass habitat were taken up and considered by the Marine Resources Management Subcommittee under the National Policy and Plan Committee on Marine and Coastal Resources Management. A total of 16 sites of seagrass beds in the Gulf of Thailand have been approved by the National Committee as the yearly permanent monitoring sites starting from 2021 onward. Recent monitoring and assessment revealed highest proportion of good seagrass abundance condition in most of the area.

33. In terms of SAP implementation, the proposed site is Chaiya-Phunphin which has a total seagrass area of more than 1,000 ha distributed in four districts. The site is part of Bandon Bay, one of the most productive coastal area in Southern Thailand. The main source of freshwater and nutrient is the Tapi River which provides support to plankton production in the estuary ecosystem. The area was also selected being one of the Fisheries Refugia site in Thailand. Human activity is the main challenge identified in the site such as fishing and aquaculture where shellfish culture have been operating on seagrass beds. Coastal agriculture, urbanization and industries is another where discharge of waste and wastewater goes into the sea. The proposed activities for implementation are: 1) Law Enforcement and Legislation by establishing measures to control activities that cause impact on seagrass; 2) Conservation and Rehabilitation by conserving and storing seagrass and establishing zones for different utilization; 3) Education and Awareness Raising through education and awareness raising among local people and other resources users about the impact and sustainable use of seagrass beds; 4) Networking and Collaboration by building collaboration among stakeholders and public participation; and 5) Research and Monitoring and Evaluation by conducting research in various aspects on seagrass conservation and restoration including monitoring and evaluation. To access the Thailand's presentation, please click [[LINK](#)].

34. Dr. Virginie Hart thanked all the presenters for the valuable presentations, especially in terms of the SAP evaluation and implementation. Most notable are the consideration of the Fisheries Refugia project in the selection of sites and encouraged participants to coordinate closely with the Fisheries Refugia project as some activities and challenges are related and

covered by the Fisheries Refugia project. Another is the creation of Marine Protected Areas in the last decade, which would be interesting to know the broader picture of each MPAs. Also noted in the presentations are issues on land-use, sand mining, shipping, pollution and fishing and tourism activities, which should be considered in the national implementation reports. The project is going to revise and update the national reports which would contribute to the updating of the SAP. It is important to know how much has changed in the last decade in terms of the pressures and threats on seagrass.

35. Ms. Suvaluck Satumanatpan, invited regional expert from the Mahidol University of Thailand provided her views and some points and concerns on the presentations made by the countries. Based on the presentations, the countries can achieve the seagrass outcome of the SAP implementation. The strong points include the changed and increased of seagrass areas based on reasonable information and consultations, the creation of MPAs for seagrass management which the countries are doing well, the strong community-based participation, and multiple sectoral integration in project implementation, and the restoration programs initiated by some countries. A concern raised is the survival rate of seagrass and their condition and suggested to consider the best practices and successes on seagrass restoration. Another concern is policy targets, some countries have no clear policy targets while other have clear policy targets for the next 5 or 20 years and even for SDG14 on MPAs. Overall, the project needs to consider the interaction of social and natural system like seagrass including the governing system that could fit into the dynamics, changes and the complexities of the coastal ecosystem.

8.2. Best Practices in Seagrass Management

36. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to introduce the agenda on best practices on seagrass management in the region. Dr. Vo Si Tuan provided briefly the background and introduced document SCSSAP RWG-SG1. Inf.2 on best practice in habitat management and the invited regional experts. The document is a compilation of good practices and lessons learned, focusing on: 1) Reducing habitat degradation and loss, 2) Integrated management of habitat and land-based pollution management, and 3) Transboundary management and regional cooperation. Based on review, there are few best practices on seagrass, which is the same situation in the past especially in the establishment of MPAs which have not considered the seagrass habitat. It was noted from the country presentations that many seagrass areas are now covered by MPAs or under some form of management. The RWG-SG members were encouraged to go through the document and see the gaps and work together to gather and synthesize information from the presentations and other sources on the achievements and best practices of the seagrass focal area in the last decade.

37. Dr. Miguel Fortes, invited regional expert from the Philippines provided the presentation on best practices in seagrass management in Southeast Asia and other regions with emphasis on the challenges for seagrass management. The challenges identified are lack of sustainable financing, lack of awareness among people causing damages to seagrass, coastal development plans that do not take seagrass into consideration, poverty of coastal communities, lack of effective seagrass management systems, weak law enforcement, and lack of long-term regional and international cooperation/coordination.

38. Best practices was defined as a set of guidelines, ethics and ideas that ensure very efficient and prudent course of action in any aspects of seagrass management. Best practices should be looked into in two levels - at the site scale where most of the presentations focused on, and at

multi-scale, starting from the communities and up to the global scale. At the site scale, best practices on seagrass were few. Most of the best practices have been practiced and successful in mangrove and coral reef managements. The success on conservation and management of coastal resources in the region were based on: scope that prioritizes the prevailing natural ecological conditions; monitoring and adaptive management that underlie the decision-making process; involvement of local people in planning, monitoring and implementation; identification of how, when and to whom the benefits accrue; and ecocentric, not egocentric leadership and intensions. At the multi and global scale, there were changes in community perception on the challenges mentioned. The lack of effective management plans, awareness of people and law enforcement remains as the biggest challenges, and recently poverty and coastal development impacts on seagrass beds have become significant. The milestones on global and regional efforts to manage seagrass were presented. Most notable are the Bolinao Declaration in 1998, which gave birth to the World Seagrass Association, the implementation of the UNEP/GEF SCS Project in 2002, and the SCS SAP Project in 2016, and the UNEP report on the value of seagrasses to the environment and people in 2020, which was highly recommended for reading. The world's seagrass Communities of Practice, a platform linking the science-policy-practice interphase in seagrass management have been curated with 61 CoPs, of which 32 CoPs have clear seagrass science to policy mandates at different levels of governance. The region has 14 CoPs and the plan is to make them a model for CoPs and seagrass management. The potential of new technologies such as seagrass beds simulation supported by remote sensing and drone technology have to be explored.

39. The areas of concern where the region have gained some advances but still requires more data and information includes: 1) Seagrass ecosystem services but their trade-offs are lesser understood; 2) Local and global natural and anthropogenic threats to seagrass meadows; 3) Integrated management options that recognize the multiple benefits of seagrass ecosystems; 4) Regional, national and local practices that have led to proven benefits for seagrass ecosystems; 5) Citizen Science can be used to strengthen seagrass conservation; and 6) Access to funds for seagrass conservation and restoration, with a mixed approach likely to be the most effective. In closing, there is a need to: assess where countries are now vis-a-vis the original intention of the SAP; localize and contextualize those best practices using updated data and information as a lot of information were not included in the national reports; and put the region's seagrass initiatives within the broader global perspective of issues and scientific and social concerns. To access the best practice presentation, please click [[LINK](#)].

40. Dr. Virginie Hart thanked the experts for their presentation and insights. She briefed the meeting on the ongoing discussions with UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Center (WCMC) to present their activities, tools, guidelines and best practices, proposed to be organized back to back with the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee meeting, indicatively set in the end of February 2022. The UNEP and WCMC are keen to collaborate and support the project in terms of tools and guidelines, revision and updating of national reports, TDA and SAP, and engaging the project to contribute to their plans and reports at the global level. The UNEP seagrass global report is useful and available and can be downloaded from the UNEP website. It comes along with the report on protecting seagrass through payment for ecosystem services document. The project will contribute to the implementation of UNEA resolutions and will have linkages with the CBD post 2020 works, which will be further elaborated. The use of new technology in monitoring such as remote sensing and drone will be considered. There is an activity under Component 2 to support a regional harmonized approach in monitoring. All of these concerns will be discussed in details in a separate meeting.

41. Dr. Hart Hart also introduced the small grant programs to the meeting. In the previous project, there was a number of activities with Non-Government Organizations and Community-Based Organizations under the small grant program, where about over 500,000 USD was allocated for the implementation of small grants initiative. Because of the success of the program, the project has an allocation of budget for the small grant program. The plan is for IMC and NTWG to become the mechanism to review and select the proposal to be implemented. The small grants program application will be reviewed at the national level and will complement the national activities. A coordinator will be recruited to coordinate and develop the mechanism and call for proposal based on SAP, which will be shared to the members of the working group.

42. Dr. Vo Si Tuan reminded that one good practice is the transboundary management of demonstration sites like the Kampot seagrass demonstration site and Phu Quoc coral reef and seagrass demonstration site between Cambodia and Viet Nam. Transboundary management is a key point for seagrass including conservation of species like dugong. He encouraged the participants to consider and provide their ideas, suggestions and inputs related to good practices documentation, dissemination and application in the last decade including the form of publication. The best practices activity will be included in the workplan.

43. An inquiry was made on the small grants program in terms of location and budget, if it is possible to propose site outside of the South China Sea boundaries and how much is the allocation for each project. Dr. Virginie Hart explained that due to project limitation, the site has to be within the boundaries of the South China Sea. She requested for some further information including justification of the proposed site and will confirm with UNEP if there is some flexibility. Regarding the allocation, the budget is about 30,000 to 40,000 USD per project.

9. Execution Arrangement and National Work Plans

44. The Co-Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the next steps in the RWG towards execution of activities under the SCS SAP, including next meeting of the RWG-SG. Dr. Virginie Hart presented the follow up actions as discussed and agreed in the meeting.

The Project Coordination Unit will:

- Share NIR guidance documents that was used on the 15 March 2021 meeting for the finalization of the NIR including the national reports and national action plans produced in the first phase of the project.
- Revise the RWG-SG TOR based on comments provided. Then share the revised version with track change by 10 December 2021 for final comments, to be received by 24 December 2021. Then adopt the document via silent procedure.
- Draft the meeting report by 17 December 2021, after all the meetings have been conducted.

At national level, the RWG-SG members are requested to:

- Adopt the RWG-SG TORs by 24 December 2021 via silent procedure
- Submit pending Seagrass NIRs by 17 December 2021, taking note of the need for more time for consultation and information gathering, and the need to provide the key indicative information needed for the cooperation agreement and signing

- Confirmation/reconfirmation of the Seagrass focal point (chairs of Seagrass committee/working group) by 17 December 2021 as some of the countries have not yet nominated their seagrass focal points.
- Complete the RWG-SG.1/4 (SAP Evaluation 2008-2020) document and discuss at national seagrass committees/working groups by 31 December 2021.
- Complete the RWG-SG.1/5 (SAP Implementation 2021-2023) document and discuss at national seagrass committees/working groups by 31 December 2021.

45. Other follow up actions requested from countries include:

- Submit pictures of meetings/site visits to PCU by 3 December 2021 for communication and news items by 3 December 2021.
- Establish national seagrass committees/working groups and share workplan of meetings. It is recommended to include Fisheries Refugia Project and experts as well as key seagrass initiatives and projects.
- Establish the National Technical Working Group (NTWG) with all habitat focal points and conduct first meeting to ensure synergies between habitats.
- Establish the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) and conduct the first meeting to confirm workplan and budget of NIRs.
- Provide best practices on seagrass management/restoration (2008-2021)

46. The next steps and meetings for 2022 are as follows:

- January 2022: Signing of legal agreements (PCAs) between UNOPS and SAP Specialized Executing Agency (SEA)
- February 2022: First Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) Meeting, back to back with workshop/training on best-practices, tools and guidelines
- April 2022: Second RWG-SG Meeting, planned to be organized twice a year (online and face to face), to present and discuss the 1) Methodology for revising the National Seagrass reports, 2) Progress in the execution of activities, 3) Monitoring and data management and indicators, 4) Any revision to work plans and budget, and 4) Compiling best-practices
- June 2022: Second Steering Committee Meeting

47. Dr. Hart also presented some consideration in the implementation of the project as follows:

- Assessment on travel restrictions whether meetings in first half of 2022 can be held in person.
- Assess and identify what additional support is needed from PCU in terms of finalizing national activities including capacity and training needs.
- Review the key impacts on seagrass and consider these impacts and new issues such as climate change.
- Compilation of seagrass resources from regional and global level.
- Launch of the Small Grants Program in 2022

To access Dr. Hart presentation on follow up actions and next steps, please click [[LINK](#)].

48. An inquiry was raised on the possibility of PCU staff attending meetings or workshops at project sites to present the project, and shouldering the cost of travel for its participation. Dr. Virginie Hart welcomed the approach and explained that the PCU has been involved in several

national meetings online. She requested the members to send information in advance on their meetings and schedules to plan and organize all meeting as well as to know whether the meeting will be held in person or online.

49. Another inquiry was made on the IMC and NTWG activities like coordinating and organizing meetings and conducting site visits, if the project will provide budget for these activities or the participating countries will cover the cost as part of their co-financing. Dr. Virginie Hart explained that the general rule of the GEF is that this will have to be covered by co-financing. There is a budget allocated for each country which could be used but most of IMC and NTWG activities should be supported through co-financing. She requested the countries to inform the project if the budget allocated is realistic for the two year duration so adjustments and revisions could be made. The project may be able to negotiate another extension but it needs to show at the next Steering Committee meeting that the execution of national activities has started, and if progressing well, the project can propose and justify another extension.

10. Any Other Business

50. The Chairperson invited members to consider and discuss any items of business introduced under agenda item 3. There were no issues and additional items raised.

11. Closure of the Meeting

51. In closing, the Co-Chairperson, Mr. Tri Edi Kuriandewa thanked all the members and participants for the completing the meeting with very good and substantial discussions and looked forward for the next RWG-SG meeting. He wished everyone to stay healthy and in good condition so the project can continue and proceed well.

52. Dr. Virginie Hart thanked all the participants and expressed happiness that the project has finally working to a more technical discussions with experts which is the real value added of having this regional approach. She encouraged the members to keep the discussion and dialogue going even through informal exchange like emails to avoid gaps between now and future meetings. She wished everyone well and hoped to meet in person in 2022.

53. With no other concerns raised, the meeting ended at 5:17 pm.

ANNEXES

1. List of Participants
2. Annotated agenda and list of documents
3. Revised Terms of Reference

Annex 1. List of Participants

National Focal Points / Representatives

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
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| Thailand Mrs. Sumana Kajonwattanakul Director, Marine and Coastal Resources Research and Development Institute Email: sumana11th@gmail.com | Viet Nam No representative |

National Team and Experts

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Regional Experts

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UN and Other Regional Organizations and Projects

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|----------------|-----------------------|
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Project Coordination Unit

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| <p>Dr. Vo Si Tuan Scientific Officer, SCS SAP Project Email : vosituan@gmail.com</p> | <p>Ms. Chanikan Vibulsuk Project Officer, SCS SAP Project Email: chanikan.vibulsuk@scssap.org</p> |

Annex 2. Annotated agenda and list of documents

Friday 3 December 2021, 13.00 – 17.00 Indochina time (ICT)

12.40-13.00 Participants are requested to login to the zoom meeting at least 10 minutes before the meeting.

| 1. Opening of the meeting | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 13.00-13.10 | 1.1 Welcome address The SCS SAP Project Senior Manager will open the meeting and deliver the welcome address. |
| 13.10-13.20 | 1.2 Introduction of members The Secretariat will be invited to introduce the members of the Seagrass Working Group and other participants |
| 2. Organization of the meeting | |
| 13.20-13.30 | 2.1 Designation of officers In accordance with the draft rules of procedure for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass, participants will be invited by the Secretariat to elect a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson and Rapporteur. |
| 13.30-13.40 | 2.2 Organization of work The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to brief participants on the proposed organization of work, the list of documents available to the meeting and administrative arrangements for the conduct of the meeting. The meeting will be conducted online in plenary. The meeting will be conducted in English. |
| 3. Adoption of the meeting agenda | |
| 13.40-13.50 | The Chairperson will invite participants to consider the draft agenda prepared by the Secretariat as document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/2, propose any amendments or additional items for consideration, and adopt the agenda. |
| 4. Consideration of the Terms of reference of the Regional Working Group | |
| 13.50-14.20 | The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to introduce document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/3: Provisional Terms of Reference for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project, previously circulated. The RWG-SG is invited to consider, amend and adopt the Terms of Reference as outlined in this document. |
| 5. Review the SAP targets for seagrass focal area | |

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| 14.20-14.30 | The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to briefly present the SAP targets on seagrass and the objectives and outputs of the SCS SAP project. |
| 6. SAP evaluation at the national level during 2008 - 2020 | |
| 14.30-14.40 | 6.1. Introduction and rationale The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to briefly introduce document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/4 Evaluation of SAP Implementations of the Seagrass Focal Area During 2008-2021. |
| 7. Reviews and revision of SAP targets at the national level | |
| 14.40-14.50 | 7.1. Introduction and rationale The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to briefly introduce document SCSSAP RWG-SG.1/5 SAP Implementation of the Seagrass Focal Area (2021-2023). |
| 8. National Presentations on SAP implementation and future planning | |
| 14.50-16.00 | 8.1. National Presentations on SAP implementation The Chairperson will invite National Seagrass Focal Points from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam to present key achievement in SAP implementation between 2008-2021 and the current status of consultations towards the revision of national targets and sites and NIRs. |
| 16.00-16.30 | 8.2. Best practices in Seagrass management Presentations from invited experts on best practices on seagrass management in the region. |
| 9. Execution arrangement and national work plans | |
| 16.30-16.40 | The Chairperson will invite the Secretariat to present the next steps in the RWG towards execution of activities under the SCS SAP, including next meeting of the RWG-SG. |
| 10. Any other business | |
| 16.40-16.50 | The Chairperson will invite members to consider and discuss any items of business introduced under agenda item 3. |
| 11. Closure of the Meeting | |
| 16.50-17.00 | The Chairperson will call for a formal motion to close the meeting. |

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Meeting documents

The Regional Working Group on Seagrass members are required to review these documents

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|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/1 | Provisional Agenda |
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/2 | Annotated Provisional Agenda |
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/3 | Provisional Terms of Reference for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project |
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/4 | Evaluation of SAP Implementations of the Seagrass Focal Area During 2008-2021 |
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/5 | SAP Implementation of the Seagrass Focal Area (2021-2023) |
| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/6 | Report of the Meeting |

Information documents

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| SCSSAP RWG-SG 1/Inf.1 | Draft List of Participants |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.3 | Cambodia Summary Profile (draft) |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.4 | China Summary Profile (draft) |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.5 | Indonesia Summary Profile (draft) |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.6 | Philippines Summary Profile (draft) |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.7 | Thailand Summary Profile (draft) |
| SCSSAP PSC.1/Inf.8 | Vietnam Summary Profile (draft) |

Reference documents

SCS SAP full project document (see www.scssap.org)

SCS Strategic Action Programme (see www.scssap.org)

SCSSAP IP 3/5 3rd Regional Inception Phase Meeting – NIR Development and Completion
[[LINK](#)]

SCSSAP PSC.1/9 1st Steering Committee Meeting of the UNEP/GEF Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP) Project [[LINK](#)]

Annex 3. Revised Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference for the Regional Working Group on Seagrass

1. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE OF A REGIONAL WORKING GROUP ON SEAGRASS

1.1 To facilitate the achievement of the Strategic Action Programme targets for seagrass, a Regional Working Group on Seagrass (RWG-SG) shall be established with overall responsibility for: co-ordinating the work of the National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups established in each of the participating countries; for ensuring effective implementation of project activities undertaken in the context of the achievement of the seagrass management targets of the project; and to provide a mechanism for exchange of information and experience of seagrass management activities in each country.

2. MEMBERSHIP

2.1 The RWG-SG of the SCS SAP Project shall consist of the Chairpersons of the National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups together with one member of the SCS SAP Project Coordination Unit and selected regional experts. The SCS SAP Project Coordination Unit in consultation with the National Technical Focal Points for the project shall nominate no more than four such experts to ensure a balance of expertise and specialisation consistent with the mandate of the working group.

2.2 The membership of the RWG-SG shall be formally established at the first meeting of the Working Group, which shall elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chair from amongst its members, which will be for the period of 12 months (unless otherwise agreed). The Vice-Chair shall act as Chairperson of meetings in the absence of the Chairperson. The Chairperson of the RWG-SG will represent the RWG-SG on the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) and will attend the meetings of that Committee.

3. SECRETARIAT

3.1 The SCS SAP Project Coordination Unit shall act as Secretariat to the RWG-SG, and shall ensure that reports of the meetings are circulated to all members of the working group, and are copied to the members of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee. The National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups shall serve as the principal source of national scientific and technical data and information to the RWG-SG.

4. MEETINGS OF THE REGIONAL WORKING GROUP

4.1 The SCS SAP Project Coordination Unit in consultation with the Chairperson shall convene meetings of the RWG-SG according to an agreed schedule, which will form part of the agreed work plan and timetable for the work of the Committee/Working Group. The first meeting of the RWG-SG will agree on the detailed activities, workplan and timetable for the first-year project execution.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The RWG-SG shall:

5.1 Provide direction, and strategic guidance to the National Seagrass Committees/Working Group regarding the conservation, management and sustainable use of 26,036 ha of known seagrass area in the South China Sea by Year 5 of the project, including the achievement of the following targets¹:

- Twenty-one seagrass areas totalling 26,036 ha under sustainable management with supporting laws and regulations
- Amended management plans for 7 existing MPAs with significant seagrass areas, to include specific seagrass-related management actions
- Designation of 7 new Marine Protected Areas focusing on seagrass areas
- Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 20 sites

5.2 Assume overall responsibility for the timely execution of project activities in support of the achievement of the abovementioned targets;

5.3 Update, in close collaboration with the National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups, the regional seagrass meta-database and GIS, including meta-data on biodiversity and the results of seagrass research pertaining to this project.

5.4 Develop, in close collaboration with the National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups, public awareness and information materials concerning the national and regional importance of such ecosystems;

5.5 Receive, and review reports, data and information from the National Seagrass Committees/Working Groups and compile the regional syntheses regarding seagrass management needs and priorities;

5.6 Develop guidelines regarding best practices for sustainable seagrass management for adoption and application at national level in participating countries;

5.7 Develop, review and recommend for adoption by the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee the proposed targets and timelines that may be included in a revised Strategic Action programme in order to achieve, sustainable management of seagrass of the South China Sea in the longer-term;

5.8 Prepare a regional review of national experiences in seagrass restoration with a view to developing widely applicable guidelines concerning best practices in seagrass restoration and rehabilitation;

5.9 Review and evaluate, at the regional level, progress in implementation of the seagrass activities of the project, and provide guidance for improvement when necessary; and

5.10 Develop annual workplans and provide periodic progress reports to the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee.

¹ To be revised if required following finalization of the National Implementation Reports