



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

Fourth Meeting of the SCS SAP Steering Committee

22-24 June 2026, Hainan, China

STATUS AND PROGRESS OF SCS SAP PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AT REGIONAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL



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Since the Third PSC meeting in May 2025, the following activities and events were undertaken and achieved at regional and national level, in collaboration and cooperation with national implementing partners and regional organizations.

Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA) Implementation

Project Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand for national execution of all three components have been signed and amended to extend the duration of the agreement and activity timelines until end of 2026, with the following national implementing partners:

- Cambodia: Ministry of Environment
- China: South China Institute of Environmental Sciences-Ministry of Ecology and Environment
- Indonesia: Center for Coastal and Marine Resources Studies-Ministry of Environment
- Philippines: Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands
- Thailand: Department of Marine and Coastal Resources-Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

Activities implemented include the review and assessment of policies and regulations including public hearings and consultations, surveys and mapping including collection of data and baseline information, TDA/SAP development and updating, information, education and awareness campaign including signboards installation and waste collection, habitat management including management plan development, enrichment planting and replanting and working group establishment, training workshops and capacity building activities, coastal cleanups and patrolling, aside from the regular coordination and consultations by implementing partners with stakeholders.

In the case of Vietnam, the cooperation agreement was not pursued because of the delay in the project document approval due to the merging of ministries, resulting in restructuring, reorganization and changes of officials and implementing partners. Instead, specific priority activities have been supported by the project such as the development and drafting of the national TDA report, implementation of small grants initiative and proposed marine spatial planning activity for marine ecosystems.

Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Programme (SAP) Development and Updating

Development and updating of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and the Strategic Action Programme (SAP), is a key deliverable of the project. The regional TDA consultants have been working with national TDA teams throughout the reporting period.

In January 2026, the draft national and regional TDA reports with the recommended national priorities and actions for cost benefit analysis were presented to the members of the RSTC and RTF-Economic Valuation for comments and inputs. The recommended priority actions will make up the core of the updated SAP based on the TDA analysis. The TDA process is now completed and the TDA reports will be submitted by June 2026.

The overall SAP process aims to identify a strategic suite of transboundary and national actions that can mitigate the assessed environmental risks of the SCS-GoT LMEs based on evidence borne out of the TDA exercise. To launch the SAP phase, a guidance document has been prepared by the Regional TDA-SAP Team

to include setting numeric targets of proposed transboundary and supporting non-transboundary actions as identified in the Regional and National TDA reports. For regional transboundary actions, the Regional TDA-SAP Team developed project concept notes, including draft numeric targets. The actual valuation methods to be used for assessing transboundary and supporting national contributions are in process of being designed by the Regional Working Group on Economic Valuation. The economic valuation of the regional concept notes drafted by the Regional TDA-SAP Team will be coordinated by the PCU with the goal of providing the NET cost benefit analysis of the action priorities. The National SAPs, priority actions to be taken by participating countries will likewise be assessed for their net benefits for people and ecosystems.

Based on these documents, the subsequent process and timelines for the updating of the SAP will be discussed and agreed at the PSC-4.

Small Grants Programme Initiative

The SCS-SAP Small Grants Programme or Seas of East Asia Grants (SEA:Grants) was launched in the last quarter of 2025 with the call for proposals on innovative and integrated approaches across key thematic areas, contributing directly to the SCS SAP goals including habitat protection, sustainable resource use, and pollution reduction. Open to all countries along the South China Seas and Gulf of Thailand, this initiative is a 12-18 months period of implementation with funding support of 50,000 USD each, focusing on community-based initiatives on marine and coastal ecosystems conservation. Seven SEA:Grants recipients have signed their contracts and commenced implementation between September and October 2025. This constitutes the first phase of the proposed regional financial facility.

The seven SEA:Grants recipients are as follows:

- Cambodia: SAMAKY Organization with Khmer Ocean Life – Kampot Dolphin Ecotourism
- China: Lingshui Pioneer Community Development Center – Sustainable Coastal Ecotourism in Tonghai Village
- Indonesia: Yayasan WeBe Konservasi Ketapang – Marine Conservation and Blue Livelihood Enhancement in Kendawangan
- Malaysia: Reef Check Malaysia – Community Marine Conservation Leaders Network
- Philippines: Seed Core Agri-Industrial Corporation – Climate Resilient Seaweed Farming for Coastal Livelihoods in Palawan
- Thailand: Pacific Environment and Resources Center – Scaling Community-Led Coastal and Marine Conservation in Trat Province
- Vietnam: University of Economic Ho Chi Minh City and Partners – Women4Mangrove in Cu Lao Dung Island

Regional Financing Mechanism Development

Constituting the second phase of the proposed financing facility (also referred as SEA:PUFFER or Seas of East Asia Partnership United towards a Financing Facility for Environmental Restoration and Conservation) is the development of a regional financing mechanism, and engagement with private sector and donors, including ensuring a steady flow of funds to the financing facility, which is envisioned to extend beyond the lifetime of the SCS-SAP Project in collaboration with the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA). A consultant has been engaged, Ms. Molly Dean, to design the financing facility settings including engagement with potential donors and the private sector.

Knowledge Management Initiative

Initiated the Seas of East Asia: Learning Exchange and Resource Network (SEA:LEARN), a regional knowledge management platform and gateway to authoritative resources on coastal and marine management in the region. This platform aims to facilitate voluntary data/information sharing, integration, and collaboration across countries and stakeholders by providing streamlined access to vital marine conservation data, best practices, and knowledge, drawing inspiration from the long-running Global Environment Facility's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network (GEF IW:LEARN) platform.

A Communication and Knowledge Management Specialist has been engaged and actively supporting this initiative, which will be carried out in collaboration with COBSEA, which is set to integrate and sustain the platform. A consultancy service provider has been engaged, Softengi, to develop and operationalize the SEA:LEARN platform.

Conferences, Meetings and Events

Organized, co-organized and participated in various international and regional conferences, meetings and events as follows:

24th Annual Consultative Meeting on Large Marine Ecosystems and Coastal Partners (LME24) from 14-16 May 2025 in Athens, Greece where the project, together with COBSEA and Gulf of Mexico LME Project, connected and shared with the broader LME community their key achievements and challenges. The event titled "Thirty years of LME Collaboration: Advancing Policy Coherence and Integration" provided and fostered dialogue, knowledge exchange, and forged new strategic partnerships for sustainable marine management globally.

Third UN Ocean Conference from 9-13 June 2025 in Nice, France where the SCS SAP project together with eight regional organizations in the East Asian Seas region collaborated and co-organized side events entitled Scaling collective action for 30x30: The East Asian Seas Regional Collaborative Network of MPAs on 9 and 13 June 2025, for its launch of the East Asian Seas Regional Collaborative Network of MPAs. The event responds to Cambodia's call for greater regional collaboration during the PEMSEA EAS Congress in Xiamen in November 2024 and aligns with the discussions from stakeholder planning and alignment workshops and a joint side event at the 10th Our Ocean Conference in Busan in April 2025. The side events highlighted the Regional MPA Network as a platform for joint action, knowledge exchange, and capacity building to accelerate progress toward SDG14 and 30x30. Regional actors presented the approaches for connected, inclusive, and effective marine protection across the EAS region.

Second Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Habitats (Mangroves, Coral Reefs, Seagrass and Wetlands) on 11-12 August 2025 in Iloilo City, Philippines. The second meeting of RWG-Habitats marks the first onsite meeting of the working groups since the first inaugural virtual RWG meeting in December 2021. The meeting combined and brought together all four working groups in one meeting/venue to provide an opportunity for discussions and collaborations across the habitats, recognizing that conservation initiatives impact ecosystems. The meeting discussed the TDA development process, the establishment of an SCS/GOT network of coastal and marine areas, and the integration of the SCS SAP RWG with the COBSEA WGMCE.

Third Meeting of the Working Group on Marine and Coastal Environment (WGMCE-3) of COBSEA on 13-14 August 2025 in Iloilo City, Philippines to present the project's key deliverables and explore synergies to integrate it into COBSEA's MCE framework, ensuring long-term sustainability of project activities. The meeting was followed by a field trip co-organized by COBSEA, DENR/BMB, ACB, SCS SAP Project and

ZSL on 14 August 2025 to learn best practices on mangroves conservation and restoration efforts from locally managed marine protected areas.

Knowledge sharing and exchange workshop on Understanding and Accelerating Actions on Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in the Marine and Coastal Areas of East Asian Seas jointly organized by COBSEA and ACB on 14-16 August 2025, Iloilo City, Philippines. The workshop enabled the participating countries to share the status of their work on OECMs including best practices in the marine and coastal areas.

Learning exchange and study tour for SCS SAP local site managers in conjunction with the 2025 PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) meeting in Jakarta, Indonesia on 16-18 September 2025 to enhance their knowledge and skills, facilitate connections between local government officials and site managers and strengthen collaboration between SCS SAP and PEMSEA to support long-term regional sustainability efforts. An SCS SAP Roundtable Session was organized on 17 September 2025 where the site managers from SCS SAP participating countries presented and shared their achievements, experiences and best practices on integrated management approaches at site level.

Asia Pacific Workshop on Accelerating the Implementation of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework through an Integrated and Synergistic Approach on 7-10 October 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Co-organized by UNEP, UNDP, FAO, and CBD Secretariat, the workshop aims to provide an overview of the status of NBSAP revision and implementation in the Asia-Pacific region, highlighting successful examples of integrated and synergistic implementation, as well as remaining needs and priorities, including promoting knowledge sharing on the interconnections between biodiversity, food systems, health and climate change, and exchange on policy entry points and synergies across these key sectors as well as relevant MEAs for implementation of NBSAPs and the KMGBF.

Second IOC/WESTPAC Workshop on Marine Spatial Planning – Accelerate Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific on 14-16 October 2025 in Chonburi, Thailand to review the current progress and challenges, and chart the course for the marine spatial planning in the region through the Regional Action Framework for Marine Spatial Planning (2025–2030). The workshop strengthened cooperation and knowledge sharing among regional organizations and initiatives on marine spatial planning.

SEA:Grants Inception Meeting was held online on 17 October 2025 to provide a platform for selected seven grantees to exchange the project and provide guidance on monitoring, reporting, and communication approaches.

Regional Inception Meeting of the Promoting the Blue Economy and Strengthening Fisheries Governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (GoTFish Project) on 18-19 November 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Organized by SEAFDEC, the inception meeting marks the official start of the GoTFish Project implementation bringing together key partners and stakeholders, primarily to introduce the project's framework and objectives as well as discuss and explore opportunities for collaboration.

Third Meeting of the Regional Working Group on Land-Based Pollution on 26-28 November 2025 in Batam, Indonesia. The third meeting of RWG-LBP reviewed the status and achievements of land-based pollution activities at the national level, including the development and updating of national Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) on pollution reports and data needs. The meeting also discussed the planning and execution for implementing land-based pollution activities, including the mechanism and ways to move forward for implementing and tracking regional activities.

Special Meeting of the Regional Task Force on Economic Valuation on 11 December 2025. This virtual meeting participated by the Regional TDA/SAP Team and RTF-EV members discussed the development of a

guidance template for doing a cost-benefit analysis of core actions, which will be used to rank recommended regional and national actions based on their net benefits. The recommended actions across various themes (Ecosystems, Pollution, Fisheries, Climate Mitigation, and Governance) at both LME and national scales were presented and discussed.

6th SEA of Solutions Forum from 16-17 December 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand. Co-organized by UNEP ROAP and COBSEA, the Forum brings together stakeholders, including government representatives, experts, the private sector and youth, to tackle plastic pollution and marine litter. This year's Forum follows up the key discussions on how to support countries in the region under the slogan "Partnerships and Solutions for Plastic Pollution".

Third Meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee on 26-28 January 2026 in Phu Quoc, Vietnam. The third meeting of RSTC primarily reviewed and discussed the draft regional and national Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) reports, which provide the foundation and essential scientific and technical justification for the development of both national Strategic Action Programme (SAP) priorities and regional SAP priorities. The discussion centered on the TDA findings and recommended priority actions, ensuring that the resulting regional SAP effectively addresses transboundary action priorities while supporting national goals.

Fourth Meeting of the COBSEA Task Force on 29-30 January 2026 in Phu Quoc, Vietnam. The COBSEA Task Force is mandated to provide recommendations to the COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) on the institutional and organisational strengthening of COBSEA. Since a strong COBSEA is important for long-term sustainability of project deliverables and impacts, the SCS-SAP project supports the Task Force activities, including logistical support to this first in-person Task Force meeting. The Task Force will deliver its recommendations to the COBSEA IGM in November 2026.

Green Fins Regional Workshop on 4-7 February 2026 in Bali, Indonesia. The workshop focused on enhancing regional capacity and strengthening regional alliance between Philippines and Indonesia in mitigating transboundary threats arising from marine tourism activities through sharing data-driven policy tools to mitigate tourism-related threats to marine ecosystems, and aligning regional needs with national plans to ensure long-term funding and institutional support for Green Fins. The workshop is part of the SCS SAP and Reef-World Foundation collaboration project 'Improving ecotourism standards in the region by mainstreaming Green Fins', which aims to integrate internationally recognized marine ecotourism standards in the marine tourism industry of the region to ensure transboundary collaboration for sustainable blue economic impact to local communities, marine ecosystems and species.

SEA:Grants Reconnect Webinar for Knowledge Sharing and Learning Exchanges on 13 March 2026 where the seven SEA:Grants recipients gathered to share progress versus agreed workplan and budget, share challenges and lessons in community-led marine conservation in the region. The In-person Event for Showcase and Learning Exchange is planned from 24-25 June 2026 in Hainan, China, as a back-to-back with the SCS SAP 4th PSC Meeting, to exchange best practices and lessons learned from challenges and risk management.

Global MPA Capacity Development Think Tank/Community of Practice on 13-17 April 2026 in Morocco. A project by the Blue Nature Alliance and in the Global Network of MPA Networks, the workshop co-developed a global project on addressing MPA capacity and the 30x30 target. SCS-SAP and COBSEA are facilitating the regional component of this global project.

Collaboration with Regional Organizations

Co-organized with eight regional organizations (ATSEA, ACB, COBSEA, CTI-CFF, IOC-WESTPAC, IUCN Asia-Pacific, NEAMPAN and PEMSEA) the East Asian Seas Regional Collaborative Network of MPAs is a region-wide partnership for a strategic approach towards marine conservation as a platform for joint action, knowledge exchange, and capacity building to accelerate progress toward SDG14 and 30x30.

Collaborated with PEMSEA on mapping and analysis of existing MPA and MPA related initiatives, tools and resources, partnership modalities and practices with key stakeholders that bring mutual benefits, social inclusion and transparency and lessons learned in tackling MPA issues in order to build a deeper understanding of initiatives to strengthen MPA effectiveness and in support of respective regional strategic action program and strategies in the East Asian Seas region.

Together with two GEF IW projects, the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem (GoM-LME) and PROCARIBE+ (Caribbean and North Brazil Shelf LMEs), developed and submitted a twinning proposal to IWLEARN to foster peer-to-peer learning, strengthen regional cooperation, and accelerate the adoption of best practices in transboundary water and marine management. The twinning initiative will enable cross-regional transfer of methodologies, innovations, and governance approaches, enhancing collective resilience and sustainability. The twinning proposal was approved for implementation.

Co-organized with IW:LEARN and MSPglobal, in collaboration with COBSEA and UNESCO/IOC WESTPAC the East Asian Seas Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) Regional Training Workshop from 20-22 July 2026 in Bangkok, Thailand, which aims to strengthen the understanding and capacities on MSP concepts, processes, and practical implementation approaches, as a way to help accelerate the implementation of MSP in the region, including enhancing the awareness on existing national and regional MSP mechanisms and their linkages to global frameworks, and application of the newly developed practical approach to integrate MSP and sustainable blue economy into the TDA/SAP process implemented at the scale of the LMEs.

To ensure long-term sustainability of project deliverables and impacts, the SCS-SAP project is exploring integration of key deliverables into COBSEA. This includes the TDA/SAP (SEA:STAR), which would be aligned with developing new COBSEA Strategic Directions, future planning and resource-mobilization efforts in the East Asian Seas, the regional knowledge management platform (SEA:LEARN), and the financing facility mechanism (SEA:PUFFER).

Project Management and Coordination

Recruited and engaged project staff and consultants to support the SCS-SAP project and COBSEA activities and integration, the development and updating of TDA/SAP, the knowledge management and communication activities, the development of the financing facility mechanism, and the strengthening of COBSEA.

Engagement of National Coordinators for Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, China and Vietnam have been extended to provide project management and technical support to the project and national teams in development and implementation of national activities. Bi-weekly National Coordinators meetings with UNOPS and PCU teams were organized and regularized to guide and monitor the project progress and concerns at national level.

PCU and National Coordinators have participated and provided presentations and inputs in project coordination and consultation meetings and site visits organized by the project and implementing partners on matters related to execution arrangements and requirements, development and amendment of cooperation framework (MOU) and agreements (PCA and GSA), development and finalization of workplans, activities and budgets for all components, monitoring and tracking implementation progress including reporting, among others. Missions and visits were organized to present and discuss the project, its progress and concerns.

Travel support provided to the National Coordinators to facilitate and speed up project implementation and execution process particularly the review and signing of the project agreements (PCAs and GSAs) including execution arrangements, coordination and consultation meeting with national lead agencies and partners, participation in training workshops and events, and monitoring and visits to project sites.

In consultation with UNEP and UNOPS, the project's workplan and budget have been revised and finalized following the approval of the project extension until 2027 at the Third Meeting of the Project Steering Committee in May 2025 in Manila, Philippines. After endorsement by the Steering Committee, the project extension until December 2027 has been formalized by UNEP and UNOPS.

Established and maintained the SCS-SAP Project office at the Kasetsart University-Faculty of Fisheries. The office houses the Project Coordination Unit and various reports and publications (printed and electronic) produced during the first phase of the project.

Project website (<https://scssap.org/>) and social media accounts ([Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#)) maintained and updated, and contributed news articles for the GEF IW Portfolio Bulletin. A web system and technology update were undertaken including a facelift and content restructuring to reflect the project's activities and achievements. The project's Facebook page followers grew due to active, regular outreach campaigns. Updates on project events and country-level activities were posted. A major upgrade is planned for the reporting period for even wider reach. Similarly, the LinkedIn page followers grew.

Technical and financial implementation remains aligned to the revised project work plan and on schedule. To date, 71% of the project budget has been disbursed according to the planning and 90% of the budget is formally committed, including the signed cooperation Agreements, Grants, service contracts, and consultancies related to the key flagship outputs mentioned, including SEA:LEARN, TDA/SAP, SEA:Grants, and regional events.