Organized by: With the Support of:

MSP regional training workshop for the East Asian Seas

20-22 July 2026

Bangkok, Thailand

DRAFT CONCEPT NOTE

Date: 20-22 July 2026
Location: Bangkok
Venue: tbc

BACKGROUND

The Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) in the East Asian Seas host some of the world's richest marine biodiversity and most productive waters. At the same time, the region is densely populated, fast-growing, and highly vulnerable. Many coastal nations rely heavily on the ocean for food security, employment, economic development, and cultural identity. Yet competition among various sectors for ocean space is escalating.

The identified challenges underscore the urgency of advancing Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) efforts across the region. MSP is increasingly recognized as an effective approach for managing growing pressures on marine and maritime areas while safeguarding ocean ecosystems. In 2021, a review of the marine and coastal spatial planning policies in the East Asian Seas was conducted to advance marine and coastal spatial planning in the region which identified key recommended actions towards an enabling policy environment for marine and coastal spatial planning, ecosystem-based management and sustainable blue economy approaches. In 2022, a United Nations Ocean Decade Action 21: Accelerating Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific was launched to promote MSP in the region. A Marine and Coastal Ecosystems Framework in the East Asian Seas was adopted in 2023 with marine and coastal spatial planning as one of its thematic focus areas. More recently, an Action Framework for Accelerating Marine Spatial Planning in the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas (2025-2030) was adopted in 2025, setting out a suite of enabling actions to accelerate MSP implementation, support ecosystem-based management, a sustainable blue economy, and progress toward national and global ocean commitments.

GEF IW:LEARN contributes to knowledge exchange among International Waters (IW) projects by organizing targeted in-person learning activities at global and regional scales. These events enhance the skills of project teams and stakeholders while fostering long-term networking and experience sharing. Two trainings on MSP, co-organized by IW:LEARN, took place in 2025; the first one on 18–19 February 2025 in Panama for Latin American and Caribbean participants, followed by a virtual regional workshop for the Atlantic coast of West, Central, and Southern Africa region on 27–28 May 2025. Following on these trainings co-organized notably with the MSPglobal

programme[1], in collaboration with regional GEF-funded IW projects and partners, the forthcoming MSP training workshop in the East Asian Seas will mark the third event in this series.

ORGANIZING PARTNERS

This training workshop is co-organized by IW:LEARN, MSPglobal and South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand Strategic Action Programme (SCS-SAP) Project, in collaboration with the UNEP Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and UNESCO/IOC Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC).

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING

The face-to-face regional training workshop in Southeast Asia 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;
- Enhance awareness on existing national and regional MSP mechanisms and their linkages to global frameworks
- Train participants on the 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.

STRUCTURE OF THE TRAINING

The training workshop will be divided into three parts:

1. The first part will cover the fundamentals of MSP, including interactive sessions using the MSP Challenge board game adapted to specific regional needs. Other resources such as the Blue Planning in Practice materials (developed by GIZ and UNEP) and the relation to topics such as biodiversity, climate change etc., will also be included. This material will complement the self-paced MSPglobal online training course available on the Ocean Teacher Global Academy (OTGA) platform.
2. The second part will go deeper into practical ways to integrate MSP and sustainable blue economy into the transboundary diagnostic analysis/strategic action programme (TDA/SAP) process that is specific to LME programmes. This will be based on the new practical approach developed with the support of GRID Arendal.
3. The third part will explore how MSP links to global and regional frameworks. Countries will also have the opportunity to share their experiences and approaches at national level, followed by examples of technical support provided to countries.

The training workshop agenda will be tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the region, drawing on lessons learned and reflections from the previous two workshops in the series, the MSP Regional Forum (2022) and two regional MSP workshops for the Western Pacific and its Adjacent Areas jointly organized by WESTPAC and MSPglobal in 2023 and 2025. It will be co-designed with key projects and partners to ensure that it effectively responds to the regional priorities and framework, supports ongoing MSP efforts, and strengthens the capacity of participating projects, countries and stakeholders.

[1] The MSPglobal programme is executed by the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of UNESCO with the support of the European Commission (https://www.mspglobal2030.org/)

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AGENDA OVERVIEW

Part	Indicative duration	Section	Host	Description
1	1 ½ days	i. MSP fundamentals, tools and resources	MSPglobal lead; GRID Arendal co-lead	Understand basic principles of MSP and present the MSPglobal Guideline on MSP, including data and assessments for MSP Apply basic concepts of MSP through the MSPchallenge game Introduction to transboundary MSP
2	½ day	ii. MSP and TDA/SAP	GRID Arendal	MSP as vehicle for Sustainable Blue Economy Apply newly developed practical approach to integrate MSP and sustainable blue economy into the TDA/SAP process implemented at the scale of the LMEs
3	1 day	iii. Global and regional actions and frameworks	MSPglobal; WESTPAC; COBSEA	MSP & International Agreements (Biodiversity & Climate-smart) Enhance awareness of how MSP links to global and regional action frameworks and initiatives
		iv. National experiences and approaches	Country representatives	Share national experiences, perspectives and challenges on the application of MSP approaches Interactive discussion on global, regional and national linkages
		v. Technical support to countries	MSPglobal; WESTPAC/FIO; SwAM	Examples of tools and approaches, as part of technical support to countries

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TARGET PARTICIPANTS

The training will target GEF IW projects, national authorities and supporting institutions engaged in MSP initiatives, regional organizations, representatives of government and academia.

SET-UP

The training will take place in-person over three days. It will combine theoretical sessions with hands-on practical/simulation exercises and interactive sessions. The training will be delivered in English by MSPglobal and GRID Arendal staff as partners to IW:LEARN. The total number of participants will take into consideration the optimal number of participants for the MSP Challenge Game (30-35 people at a given time).