



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

*Third Regional Inception Phase Meeting – NIR Development and Completion
14.00 – 16.30 Bangkok Time, Monday 15th March 2021*

REPORT OF THE MEETING

Report of the Meeting

Introduction and Attendance

The third meeting of the Inception Phase of the UNEP GEF Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP) Project was held via videoconference (ZOOM) on the 15th March 2021 from 14.00-16.30 Bangkok time.

The five of the six participating countries of the SCS SAP project attended the meeting, with representatives from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand. A total of forty-three participants attended the meeting including the SCS SAP Project Implementation Unit. The complete list of participants is set out in Annex 3 to the present report.

Welcome statements

The meeting began with the welcome statement from Ms. Virginie Hart, SCS SAP Project Inception Phase Team Leader. She thanked all the participants for their participation, noting that the meeting is a working meeting focusing on the preparation of inception phase documents particularly the National Implementation Report (NIR) for adoption at the First PSC meeting planned in May 2021. She stressed that the meeting is very important to have a common and clear understanding on how to complete the NIR. Ms. Hart informed the participants that the main objective of the meeting is to provide support and guidance to the national teams/consultants who will develop the NIR over the next two months. Specifically, providing clear guidance on: 1) the role of the national and local coordination structures responsible for the national level coordination and execution of activities; 2) the NIR template, guidance and approach to its completion; 3) clarifications on the structure of the project and the difference between local, national and regional level activities planned; 4) the methodology and approach to review selected sites in Component 1; 5) budget and co-financing requirements; 6) timeline and steps to complete the NIR; and 7) any challenges and questions by the national teams.

Ms. Hart presented briefly the timeline and required activities, broken down into three phases – Inception Phase from 2019 to May 2021, Inception Workshop/1st Steering Committee in May 2021, and Full Implementation Phase from May 2021 to June 2024. She noted that the main challenge is the preparation of all inception phase documents, budgets, workplans and detailed activities by April 2021. She presented the key SCS SAP documents developed and produced in the previous and current phases including the documents for the meeting. She encouraged the participants to actively participate in the meeting and wished the meeting a success.

NIR Development Process and Guidance including Discussions

Dr. Vo Si Tuan, SCS SAP Project Regional Advisor presented the background and guide in the development and completion of the NIR, following the NIR guidance document, with the assistance of the SCS SAP Project Team. He informed the participants that the NIR consisted mainly of two parts – Part 1 Background and General Information, and Part 2 National Actions to be Implemented under Component 1. He stressed that the NIR is equivalent to a National Project Document that will be adopted at the 1st Project Steering Committee meeting in May 2021.

Before going into the technical details of the NIR development, the participants were requested to provide their feedbacks and observations on the draft NIR template and the supporting guidance documents including past SCS documents.

Mr. Than Monomoyith of Cambodia's Ministry of Environment (MoE) of Cambodia informed the meeting that they have just developed together with the consultant the agreement on NIR development and will look into the NIR as soon as possible.

Mr. Yu Yunjun of China's South China Institute of Environmental Sciences (SCIES) said that they have reviewed and gone through the details of the NIR and are aware of the works required.

Mr. Dida Migfar Ridha of Indonesia's Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) raised the concern on the project's overall target at the regional level and how to set the targets for each country at national level.

Ms. Armida Andres of the Philippines' Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) informed the meeting that they have reviewed the NIR and conducted multistakeholder workshop to jointly review the NIR including sharing working documents for other agencies to look into the outcomes and outputs of the project as well as to provide inputs on activities, budgets and workplan. She said that the current COVID 19 pandemic has restricted them to gather more information on the recommended sites. She expressed appreciation on the assistance and work provided by Mr. Romeo Trono in developing/updating the NIR. Mr. Romeo Trono, National Technical Advisor informed the meeting that they are very much aware of the NIR template and requirements. He however raised some observations on the NIR such as the cutoff period in updating the Tables 1-4 of Part 1 and the target hectares committed under Part 2. He inquired if there is a specific period required in updating the national strategies and plans, projects and initiatives, reports and publications and stakeholders. He also inquired if countries are allowed to redistribute the targets but still maintaining the total targets. He provided the wetlands target as example where 24,000 has of estuaries and 30,000 has of tidal flats were targeted. He asked if they can reduce the tidal flats and increase the estuaries targets.

Mr. Ukkrit Satapoomon of Thailand's Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) informed the meeting that they have gone through and clearly understand the outline and structure of the NIR. He said that they are currently revising some of the details and information provided based on present condition.

Following the country's feedback on their understanding of the NIR template and requirements, Dr. Tuan presented in details the structure and requirements of the NIR particularly Part 1 the overview of key national policies, projects and stakeholders, and the national coordination and oversight; and Part 2 the national actions to be implemented. Dr. Tuan stressed the importance of the different parts and the need to update and provide inputs.

Ms. Hart noted the observations made by the countries in developing their NIR. She stressed and clarified the need to update the baseline information since a lot of the information were produced and gathered during the first phase which ended in 2008, and during the project preparation phase in 2016. She said that the baseline information and updating will assist countries to justify the development and revision of activities, making sure that the activities developed support the current national policies and strategies, projects and initiatives including best practices and ongoing

collaboration at site level. She said that there is no cutoff or specific period required in updating the baseline information but it is important to include the past SCS reports and publications particularly the national reports and national action plans, past and current policies and plans, projects and initiatives. Ms. Hart also stressed the importance of engaging all relevant ministries in the Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) especially in the first meeting where they will adopt the members. She clarified that existing committees may be engaged but will have to follow the functions and terms of reference provided in the Project Document. As to the engagement of Specialized Executing Agencies (SEAs), Ms. Hart clarified that this is the same approach used by the previous project where different agencies were engaged to implement the different components of the project. The countries however can propose a different structure like having one SEA to support all thematic areas. She stressed that the project structure is flexible and vary from country to country.

Open discussion followed after presentation of each section and requirements of the NIR where participating countries raised their concerns and challenges in developing the NIR.

On the project national structure and budget process, Mr. Trono inquired on the nomination and revision of nomination, whether it is based on agencies and not on personalities. Ms. Hart clarified that nomination is based on the agencies and if there are changes, countries can submit new nominations. She stressed the need to have the names of the IMC and NTWG chairs as they will participate in the First Project Steering Committee meeting in May 2021. Ms. Andress informed the meeting that they will look into the arrangement of having only one SEA, but will make sure that NFP including those from the academe with the required expertise on mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass and wetlands, land-based pollution and economic valuation will represent the project.

Mr. Ukkrit noted the agreement signing and budgeting process with SEAs which may not be applicable for Thailand. He clarified that DMCR is the lead agency and focal point of the project and will be the only agency that will sign the agreement as well as receive the budget for all the thematic areas.

Mr. Dida recognized the scope and challenges of the project and the need to sit and work together with other line ministries to understand the project and build capacity and institutional arrangements for the project. He noted that the NIR only focuses on Component 1 and how to link this with other components to have a comprehensive and integrated activities. He said that there are national circumstances that need to be considered in the project arrangements like the regulation on fund management that requires Finance Ministry registration to ensure good management of cooperation. He suggested that the project should be flexible based on national circumstances. He informed the meeting that the Director General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control has been officially appointed as the leading unit for the implementation of the project.

Mr. Yu raised the issue on COVID-19 which will affect future meetings of the project which are currently done virtually. He noted the combined budget available for the 3 components for each country which may not be enough. He informed the meeting that in China they plan to combine all SEAs into one SEA which they will termed as 'Habitats' to cover all the thematic areas.

Dr. Tuan clarified that the project structure is based on the previous project but the current project has some flexibility on the structure. He stressed the implications of combining SEAs and the need to consider the technical concerns like mangroves and coral reefs which are very different. He said

that there are several Regional Working Groups which is mainly composed of scientific experts that will review and develop indicators, parameters, monitoring and assessment activities. If one focal point will attend all the working groups, the nominated focal point will be overloaded.

Ms. Hart stressed that there is flexibility to have several or one SEAs but not to lose the need for a focal point for each of the habitat which requires different expertise, and that it will not look good to have one person who is an expert in one habitat to cover the other habitats. She encouraged countries to consider having one focal point per habitat because there are Regional Working Groups and Task Forces for each habitat and inter-linkages between habitats. The intention and purpose of having several regional working groups will be lost if we bring together all focal points on mangroves to coordinate coral reefs, seagrass and wetlands activities. She suggested that countries may combine and have one SEA with several focal points within the agency.

Dr. Tuan presented briefly the three project components and outcomes and stressed that there are three levels in designing activities i.e local/site level, national level and regional level with each level covering specific components and activities. He said that at the current stage, countries need to focus on designing activities at site level including developing workplans and allocation of budgets for the designed activities at site level, and that national activities will be developed later.

Dr. Tuan presented the project sites along with the Fisheries Refugia sites including the guide in reviewing and updating project sites. He stressed that the sites were adopted in the SAP following a long selection process. He stressed the need to review and update the final list of sites in order to develop appropriate activities at the sites given the development since the SAP adoption in 2008, and to consider linking the sites and activities with the Fisheries Refugia network sites to improve fisheries and habitat management. He suggested that the participants use the selection guide and the different categories in the review to know the status of the sites including lessons learned for upscaling in other sites and challenges that needs to be addressed by the project. Based on the review and status, countries may retain and develop further the sites or propose alternative sites with justification and adequate baseline information.

Ms. Hart pointed out that site review and reconfirmation was one of the early inception phase activities undertaken and requested by the project team from countries knowing that the development of site activities would take some time to complete. She said that it is important to review the sites and targets that were in the national reports which are reflected in the SAP and in the NIR. She informed the meeting of the different options in updating the sites like maintaining the original sites if partial work has been done and would still need additional work, or proposing new sites if all targets have been achieved in the original sites. This should all be reported in the NIR and with justification for the new sites proposed. She also encouraged countries to be realistic and report any difficulty and challenges in coordinating with local/site team due to COVID-19.

Mr. Dida noted that the NIR focus on component 1 and that the project will need to design national activities for component 2 and 3. He inquired on how to develop baseline activities for Component 2 especially on land-based pollution as this is very important to support and develop national actions related to Component 2.

Mr. Yu informed the meeting that the targets mentioned in the SAP have already been achieved and that they will adjust the targets as well as reduce the number of sites because of the limited budget.

Mr. Monomoyith informed the meeting that most of their data on habitats are old and are waiting for new updated data and that he would like to get information and experiences from the countries and meeting discussions.

Mr. Trono informed the meeting that actual site visit is impossible at the moment because of COVID-19 issue and that the review and assessment of sites will be done by online and in small groups by concerned SEAs. He inquired about the SAP and project document outputs where countries committed specific targets for each habitat and would like to know if committed targets could be reduced if they have already been achieved. He noted the management plan developed and implemented in some sites and inquired if the project can support the strengthening and implementation of the plan as part of the achieving project outputs. He noted that the output on declaration of protected areas has not indicated any targets and would like to know if it is up to the country to determine and recommend the targets. On co-financing, Mr. Trono inquired if the NIR should include letter of co-financing and if the projects reported in the co-financing commitment letter in 2016 have achieved their targets, can they be reported as co-financing. Ms. Andres pointed out that project sites within marine protected areas have functional protected area superintendent and staff that they can contact to provide information, and that they will find a way to get information for those sites outside marine protected areas through the concerned SEAs and experts. She informed the meeting that they have consulted and agreed with BFAR and NFRDI to retain those sites with Fisheries Refugia sites for complementation.

Mr. Ukkrit informed the meeting that new sites have already been selected and that the number of sites have been changed – 3 for mangroves, 6 for coral reefs and 1 each for seagrass and wetlands, which were discussed in consultation with the concerned offices.

Dr. Tuan clarified some of the concerns raised by the countries in developing activities at site level. Using the site review guide table, you will know what has been done and achieved, what are the gaps and challenges that needs to be addressed and develop activities based on the review and need of sites. He said that if the site has developed a sustainable financial mechanism, then there is no need to support this activity. If there are management plan developed and approved but need support to strengthen implementation, you can design activities on capacity building. In case enforcement is weak due to lack of training, you can design and include activities for training. He stressed that the review guide applies to all habitats and sites.

Ms. Hart further clarified that one of the first activity of the project is to report on the SAP implementation which countries have already been doing through the NIR process. She noted that in China, they have basically achieved the existing SAP targets at site level. She stressed that this is very important to report as it shows that the project, though has not yet started, has somehow achieved the overall targets at regional level, and that whatever other targets decided in the review and selection of new sites and activities, these can be considered additional. She encouraged countries to assess progress towards SAP outcomes and then as appropriate propose additional activities in line with the SAP if original SAP targets have been met.

In terms of declaration of MPAs, Ms. Hart said that countries can propose activities to support and implement MPA management plans if already established since the SAP adoption in 2008. She stressed that there is flexibility between the different habitats and outcomes as long as there is a systematic reporting on what has been achieved from the original sites selected.

In terms of designing activities at the site level, Dr. Tuan stressed that activities at the site level should support directly the regional outcomes of Component 1 and that it is based on the regional outputs identified to achieve each outcome. He said that activities at each site should be developed for each of the regional outputs, unless it is an output with no target agreed in the SAP and the countries do not wish to participate in. Dr. Tuan provided some examples of activities under outputs.

To illustrate, Dr. Tuan presented as example the case of Vietnam's outcome and output of mangroves as identified in the SAP.

- Regional Outcome 1.1 Appropriate forms of sustainable management established for 860,000 ha of mangrove by Yr 5
- Regional Output 1.1.1 Declaration of 57,400 ha of mangrove as National Parks and Protected Areas
- National Output: Declaration of 30,000 ha of mangrove as National Parks and Protected Areas
- Site Activities (using the examples provided): Assessment of conservation potential, Local consultations, Zoning and regulation development, Establishment and building capacity for management board, etc

Dr. Tuan continued his presentation on the allocation of budgets for designated activities from GEF funding & co-finance. He informed the meeting that the original budget currently available for national activities is approximately 5.5 million USD in total, with the majority allocated to activities under Component 1. He said that equal allocation of funding between the six participating countries was assumed, i.e. 669,104, 187,574 and 53,267 USD respectively for Components 1, 2 and 3. He stressed that final allocation of resources will depend on the proposed targets, activities and budgets, with some flexibility if needed between Component 1 and 2.

In terms of co-finance, Dr. Tuan informed the meeting that two types of co-finance are required by GEF from participating countries: In-kind co-finance where no payment from any source for certain activities, e.g., working time spent for participating in project meetings (calculated using a regional standard co-efficient, approved by the PSC), provision of office and facilities, local transport and communications in support of project implementation, and ongoing and planned national initiatives in project sites; and In-cash co-finance where payment for certain activities by other sources besides GEF fund to achieve national outputs, e.g. rehabilitation of 15 ha of mangroves funded by a provincial project at the selected site.

Dr. Tuan informed the meeting that in estimating the budget for each activity, countries have to follow the UMOJA budget template and guide consisting of eight budget categories: Staff and Other Personnel, Travel, Contractual Services, Grants to Implementing Partners, Supplies Commodities and Materials, Non-Expendable Equipment, Operating and Other Cost and Evaluation. He explained that the budget for all activities relevant to each output of thematic areas will be consolidated.

Dr. Tuan ended his presentation with a summary of requirements as follows:

- Updating national coordinating framework with appropriate officials and experts who will support the further development of project activities and establishment of regional project steering committee, regional scientific and technical committee and regional working groups.
- Updating strategies, projects, initiatives and reports indicating gaps and needs for further action at national and local levels

- Designing activities at sites requires sufficient data/information at the local level
- Allocating co-finance based on integrated actions from central/local government, NGOs, private sector
- Developing workplan for three years until June 2024 (possible extension)

Mr. Dida inquired on co-financing if it covers only Component 1 or all components, and if the calculation of targets covers only from the project start to 2024 or from the SAP adoption in 2008 to 2024. Mr. Yu inquired on the detailed breakdown of the total project budget of 15 Million USD. Mr. Trono inquired on the ratio to use in calculating co-financing.

Dr. Tuan clarified that co-finance will be calculated for all components, starting first on Component 1 and later with Component 2 and 3. On the calculation and reporting of targets, Ms. Hart explained that countries can start from 2008 because the targets are 2008 SAP targets, and that additional targets that are above the SAP targets that will be developed in the NIR will be considered as new targets. Ms. Hart informed the meeting that the project officially ends in June 2023 and that the June 2024 covers the no-cost extension that will be requested from UNEP and the Project Steering Committee given the delay in starting project execution.

In terms of co-financing, Ms. Hart explained that co-financing is important to GEF as this is one of their success indicators, not only in achieving the outcomes and targets, and that the GEF will look and review on the reported co-financing based on the overall amount committed by countries in their co-financing commitment letters and project document. She stressed that co-financing is mostly in-kind and majority will come from Component 1 where most of the funds are allocated. She said that co-financing reporting period covers from the date the project officially started in June 2018 until the project ends, and that calculation of co-financing estimates and contributions will follow a co-financing guidance document that will be shared with the countries, based on the same approach as the previous project.

Ms. Hart explained that the budget breakdown based on the original budget approved by GEF including current expenditures was presented at the 2nd Regional Inception Phase Meeting in December 2020, and that the budget document is included in the meeting documents uploaded on the project website.

Given the difficulty in getting information from sites, Ms. Hart informed the meeting that indicative numbers can be considered at this stage for the co-financing and budget breakdown per category. She recommended to participating countries to focus on the justification for any changes at sites, to develop activities and budget and co-financing indicatively while taking note for flexibility on budget revision. She also suggested the need to have another meeting to discuss Component 2 and 3 and the relationship between national and regional activities under these two components.

Next Steps and Closing

In terms of next steps, Ms. Hart stressed that what is needed now is for countries to use the time between this meeting and May 2021 as effectively as possible. She informed the meeting that consultants have been hired to support some countries like Thailand and the Philippines while other countries decided to have a cooperation agreements to support their inception phase activities like Cambodia and China which are in its final and approval stage, and hoped that the project team and consultants are doing preparatory works while waiting for the agreements. She further hoped that

countries will prioritize to finalize the Component 1 sites with clear justification if there are changes in sites, its activities, workplans and budgets, including the names of nominated chairs of IMC and NTWG who will attend the Project Steering Committee, and the indicative focal points and SEAs of the thematic areas.

Ms Hart informed the meeting that another meeting in April 2021 will be organized to review the progress made as well as to look into Component 2 and 3 and the overall budget and revision that will be presented in the Project Steering Committee meeting. Ms. Hart noted the difficulty in organizing consultations and site visits to finalize the NIR by end of April 2021 and the delay in the inception phase, and explained that the project and participating countries may have to do further work on the NIR after the Project Steering Committee meeting.

Mr. Reynaldo Molina informed the meeting that countries are in varying stages in completing their NIRs. He stressed that the meeting is just a reiteration of previous meeting discussions but this meeting provided more guidance and clarity on how to complete the NIR. He encouraged countries to submit the required information and to contact and communicate with the regional project team who are available to provide further support and guidance.

Ms. Hart informed the meeting that the recruitment for the Country Liaison and Coordinator post has been completed and that Mr. Molina has been selected and hired as the first long term staff of the project. The Regional Project Team thanked all the participants and looked forward to working closely with all the countries on their NIR.

With the no other concerns raised, the meeting adjourned at 12:30 pm.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Agenda

Annex 2 Meeting and Reference Documents

Annex 3 List of Participants

Annex 1 Agenda

1. Welcome

A general welcome remarks from Virginie Hart, SCS SAP Inception Phase Project Team Leader to the meeting and participants

2. Meeting objectives

A brief presentation by Virginie Hart on the objectives of the meeting, general progress on the implementation of inception phase activities since the second regional inception phase meeting held on 4 December 2020

3. NIR development process and guidance

A presentation by Vo Si Tuan, the SCS SAP Project Regional Advisor on the background and guide in the development and completion of the NIR, following the NIR guidance document, with the assistance of the SCS SAP Project Team.

Part 1. Overall structure of the project

Part 2. Nomination and arrangement of national coordination

Part 3. Updating of policy/legislation, stakeholders, reports and projects

Part 4. Review of current sites and updated list of sites

Part 5. Designing activities at the national and site level

Part 6. Budget estimation including co-financing

4. Open discussion on the development and completion of the NIR

This is an open discussion with all participants, particularly those responsible in preparing/writing the NIR. As this is a working meeting, all participants are encouraged to actively participate in the discussion, share their experiences, issues and challenges in developing the NIR development, and ask questions and clarifications especially those needing immediate actions/solutions.

5. Next Steps

A presentation will be given by Virginie Hart on the next steps towards completing the NIR and preparation for the SCS SAP First Project Steering Committee/Inception Meeting

6. Any Other Matters and Conclusions

The meeting will be closed at 16.30 Bangkok time.

Annex 2 Meeting and Reference Documents

Meeting documents

- SCSSAP IP.3/1 Meeting Agenda
- SCSSAP IP.3/2 SCS SAP Summary factsheet and Inception Phase Progress
- SCSSAP IP.3/3 Project Site Selection Guide
- SCSSAP IP.3/4 UMOJA Budget Template with Guide
- SCSSAP IP.3/5 Report of the Meeting

Information documents

- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.1 Draft List of Participants
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.2 Inception Phase Guidance for Countries with NIR Guide
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.3 Draft Structure and Organogram with Terms of Reference
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.4 Project Outcomes and Outputs
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.5 SCS SAP Project Sites with the Fisheries Refugia Sites
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.6 Terms of Reference for the Inception Phase National Project Cooperation Agreement (PCA)
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.7 2nd Regional Inception Phase Meeting Report
- <https://www.scssap.org/scs-sap-2nd-inception-full-meeting-report/file>
- SCSSAP IP.3/Inf.8 1st Regional Inception Phase Meeting Report
- <https://www.scssap.org/scs-sap-online-meeting-full-meeting-report/file>

Reference documents

- SCSSAP IP.3/Ref.1 SCS SAP full project document (see www.scssap.org)
- SCSSAP IP.3/Ref.2 SCS Strategic Action Programme (see www.scssap.org)

Original SCS reports

Available at the SCS repository (<http://www.unepscs.org/remository.html>) including:

- Technical Publications and Guideline [[LINK](#)] (particularly Technical Publication 1-4)
- For more details on the site selection, see the 3rd Regional Working Group reports which includes a summary ranking as presented in Annex 7, Tables 1 and 2
 - Mangrove [[LINK](#)]
 - Coral reef sites [[LINK](#)]
 - Seagrass [[LINK](#)]
 - Wetlands [[LINK](#)] <http://www.unepscs.org/remository/startdown/370.html>
- Reports of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee [[LINK](#)]

Annex 3 List of Participants

Cambodia

<p>Mr. Kim Nong Director General, General Directorate of Administration for Nature Conservation and Protection (GDACP), and Deputy Secretary General of National Committee for Coastal Management and Development, Ministry of Environment (MoE), Cambodia Email: moepmcr@gmail.com</p>	<p>Mr. Thay Chantha Director of Marine and Coastal Zone Conservation Department, GDANCP, Deputy Secretary- General of National Committee for Coastal Management and Development, MoE, Cambodia Email: thaychantha@yahoo.com</p>
<p>Mr. Meas Rity Deputy Director of Marine and Coastal Zone Conservation Department, GDANCP, MoE, Cambodia Email: meas.rithymoe@yahoo.com</p>	<p>Mr. Than Monomoyith Vice Chief of Office, Department of Marine and Coastal Zone Conservation, GDANCP, MoE, Cambodia Email: monomoyith84@gmail.com</p>
<p>Mr. Roath Sith Assistant to the Ministry of Environment, MoE, Cambodia Email: roathsith@gmail.com</p>	<p>Mr. Sum Dara Technical official, Department of Marine and Coastal Zone Conservation, GDANCP, MoE, Cambodia Email: darasum_63@yahoo.com</p>
<p>Mr. Kim Soben Project Consultant, MOE Email: kimsoben@gmail.com</p>	

China

<p>Dr. YU Yunjun South China Institute of Environmental Sciences, Ministry of Environment and Ecology (MEE) Email: yuyunjun@scies.org</p>	<p>Ms. ZHANG Naiwen South China Institute of Environmental Sciences, MEE Email: zhangnaiwen@scies.org</p>
<p>Ms. Su Siqi South China Institute of Environmental Sciences, MEE Email: susiqi@scies.org</p>	

Indonesia

<p>Mr. Dida Migfar Ridha Director, Coastal and Marine Pollution and Degradation Control, Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MOEF) Email: dmigfar@gmail.com</p>	<p>Mr. Iwan Nirawandi Head of Section, Programme and Cooperation, Directorate of Coastal and Marine Pollution and Degradation Control, MOEF Email: iwannirawandi@gmail.com</p>
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Mr. Tedi Bagus Prasetyo Mulyo Programme and Cooperation Officer, Directorate of Coastal and Marine Pollution and Degradation Control, MOEF Email: tediprstyo@gmail.com	Ms. Fitri Harwati Head of Law and Technical Cooperation Division, Secretariat Directorate General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control, MOEF Email: harwati.fitri@gmail.com
Mr. Erlangga Wahyu Staff, Law and Technical Cooperation Division, Secretariat Directorate General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control, MOEF Email: erl.why@gmail.com	

Philippines

Mr. Angelito Fontanilla Director, Foreign Assisted and Special Projects Service (FASPS), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Email: avfontanilla.fasps@gmail.com	Ms. Armida Andres Chief, Coastal and Marine Division (CMD), Biodiversity Management Bureau (BMB), DENR Email: armida.andres@bmb.gov.ph
Mr. Conrado Bravante, Jr. Chief, Project Preparation Division (PPD), FASPS, DENR Email: conrad.bravante@yahoo.com	Mr. Eddie Abugan, Jr. Chief, Project Management Division (PMD), FASPS, DENR Email: jjcreed7@yahoo.com
Ms. Nilda Baling Section Chief, Integrated Coastal Management and Partnership, CMD, BMB, DENR Email: nilda.baling@bmb.gov.ph	Ms. Desiree Eve Maano Supervising Ecosystems Mgmt Specialist, CMD, BMB, DENR Email: desireeeve.maano@bmb.gov.ph
Mr. Jekk Paderes Development Mgmt Officer, PPD, FASPS, DENR Email: jekkpaderes@gmail.com	Ms. Maridel Villalon Development Mgmt Officer, PPD, FASPS, DENR Email: maridel_villalon@yahoo.com
Ms. Alma Segui Development Mgmt Officer, PPD, FASPS, DENR Email: ampsegu@yahoo.com	Ms. Maria Katrina Apaya Ecosystems Mgmt Specialist, CMD, BMB, DENR Email: katrina.apaya@bmb.gov.ph
Mr. Romeo Trono National Project Consultant, SCS SAP Project Email: romytrono@gmail.com	Ms. Moonyeen Manrique Assistant Chief, PMD, FASPS, DENR Email: moonmanrique@yahoo.com
Ms. Gelli Felices Project Support Officer, PMD, FASPS, DENR Email: gelfelices@gmail.com	Mr. Alvin Josue Reyes Project Evaluation Officer, PMD, FASPS, DENR Email: alvinjosuereyes@gmail.com

Ms. Jhorace Tupas CMD, BMB, DENR Email: jhorace.tupas@bmb.gov.ph	Ms. Elma Eleria Project Evaluation Officer, PPD, FASPS, DENR Email: elma_eleria@yahoo.com
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Thailand

Mr. Ukkrit Satapoomon Director, Coastal Resources Conservation Division, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources (DMCR) Email: ukkrit@yahoo.com	Ms. Khunchanaporn Wuddhivorawong Fishery Biologist (Senior Professional Level) Marine and Coastal Resources Research and Development Institute, DMCR Email: chanpenwutt@gmail.com
Ms. Saowalak Winyoonuntakul Foreign Relations Officer (Senior Professional Level) Strategy and Planning Division, DMCR Email: icsd.dmcr@gmail.com	Ms. Paweena Srisawetichot Foreign Relations Officer, Strategy and Planning Division, DMCR Email: icsd.dmcr@gmail.com
Mr. Ronawon Boonprakob Fishery Biologist (Professional Level) Costal Resources Conservation Division, DMCR Email: ronawon@hotmail.com	Ms. Chanokphon Jantharakhantee Fishery Biologist (Professional Level) Costal Resources Conservation Division, DMCR Email: chanokphon_017@windowslive.com
Mrs. Poonsri Wanthongchai Forestry Technical Officer (Senior Professional Level), Mangrove Conservation Division, DMCR Email: poonsri56@gmail.com	Ms. Wilawan Thanatemaneeerat Environmentalist (Professional Level), Pollution Control Department Email : aristrotle@gmail.com
Mr. Pituck Jongnarangsin National Project Consultant, SCS SAP Project Email: pituck@me.com	

SCS SAP Project Implementation Unit

Dr. Virginie Hart Project Inception Consultant, UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project Email: virginie.hart@scssap.org	Mr. Reynaldo F. Molina Project Management Support Specialist, UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project Email: reynaldo.molina@scssap.org
Dr. Vo Si Tuan Regional Project Consultant, UNEP/GEF SCS SAP Project Email : vosituan@gmail.com	