



Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for
THE SOUTH CHINA SEA AND GULF OF THAILAND
(SCS SAP) Project

VIET NAM National Profile

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1. INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea, which supports a number of unique habitats and ecosystems that are amongst the most biologically diverse shallow water marine ecosystems globally. The richness and productivity of the South China Sea and associated environments are, however, seriously threatened by high population growth, pollution, overharvest and habitat modification, resulting in high rates of habitat loss and impairment of the regenerative capacities of living resources. The socio-economic impacts of environmental deterioration are significant for the economies of this region.

Recognising that actions were urgently needed to halt degradation of the environment of this marine basin, the countries of the region sought the assistance of UNEP and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the project “[Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand](#)” was implemented from 2003-2008. This included a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis of the issues and problems and their societal root causes as the basis for development of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP) which was inter-governmentally adopted in 2008. The SAP established a series of objectives and priority costed actions for coastal habitats, land-based pollution management, and the over-exploitation of fish stocks in the South China Sea.

In order to support implementation of the SAP, the UNEP GEF “Implementing the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” (SCS SAP) Project was submitted and endorsed by the GEF in 2016, and began implementation in 2019. The objective of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand (SCS SAP Project) is:

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

This will be achieved through the cooperation of participating countries, intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, public-private sectors partnerships, civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), leading scientists from the region. The project will also contribute to global targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030 and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Post 2020 Biodiversity Framework.

Participating Countries:	Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam
Implementation Agency:	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
Executing Agencies:	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)
GEF Funding:	15 million USD (with approximately 83 million USD in co-financing)
Timeline:	2018-2023
Web-links:	https://scssap.org

This current document is based on the national reports, TDA and SAP prepared between 2005-2008 and presents SAP targets adopted. Countries are in the process of further refining their national activities for implementation from 2021-2024.

2 STATUS AND TRENDS IN COASTAL HABITATS AND THEIR MANAGEMENT IN VIET NAM

2.1 Biodiversity and distribution of coastal habitats

Mangroves: Viet Nam contributes significantly to the overall total of mangrove in the South China Sea (157,000 ha of the total 1.7 million ha). Viet Nam is also significant in terms of species richness with 37 true mangroves of the total 45 observed in the South China Sea. Investigation of the latitudinal variation in the number of true mangrove species in Viet Nam indicates an increase in the number of species from higher to lower latitudes, e.g., 14 species in the Gulf of Tonkin, 18 species in mid-central Viet Nam, 23 species in south-central waters, and 33 species in the Dong Nai and Mekong estuaries in the south. In terms of areal extent, notable mangrove site in Viet Nam is located in Ca Mau in the southern Mekong estuary (58,000 ha) and Can Gio in the Dong Nai estuary (34,500 ha).



Coral Reefs: Southeast Asia is recognised as the global centre of coral reefs, both in terms of areal extent and species diversity. Of the 750,000 ha of coral reef been identified in the South China Sea, around 110,000 ha is located in coastal waters of Viet Nam. Large coral sites include Ninh Hai (Ninh Thuan) (1,070 ha), Ca Na Bay (2,270 ha), and Con Dao Islands (1,000 ha). In terms of diversity at individual localities, hotspots of coral species richness occur at Nha Trang (Viet Nam) with 351 species, while a large number of sites contain more than 200 species. Viet Nam is a global hotspot of coral biodiversity. Significantly, the recent finding of the hard coral *Leptoseris kalayaanensis* in Nha Trang (westernmost location in the South China Sea) has led to calls for the western boundary of the so-called ‘coral triangle’ to be extended to cover southwestern waters of Viet Nam.



Seagrass: Of the 78,332 ha of known seagrass sites in the South China Sea, around 13,503 ha is located in the coastal waters of Viet Nam. The significant seagrass areas include: Phu Quoc archipelago (4,600 ha), Tam Giang (2,000 ha) and Thuy Trieu (800 ha). Of the 18 species of seagrass found in the coastal waters of the South China Sea, 14 are present in waters of Viet Nam. While *Halophila* is the most diverse and widespread genus in coastal waters throughout the region, the coastlines of northern Viet Nam, have characteristics of subtropical areas and the species include *Zostera japonica* together with *Halophila beccarii*, *Halophila ovalis*, *Halophila decipiens*, *Enhalus acoroides*, *Thalassia hemprichii*, *Halodule pinifolia*, *Halodule uninervis*, *Cymodocea rotundata* and *Ruppia maritime*. The distribution of *Z. japonica* extends down to northern and central Viet Nam and its occurrence in Binh Dinh Province represents the southernmost limit of this temperate species in the Indo-west Pacific. In the tropical south-central and south-western areas of Viet Nam, *Halophila spinulosa*, *Halophila minor*, *Cymodocea serrulata*, and *Thalassodendron ciliatum* are also observed. Around 12,500 ha of seagrass meadow is observed at the Phu Quoc archipelago in Viet Nam, and has strong transboundary linkages with the 25,200 ha of seagrass in the neighboring province of Kampot in Cambodia.



Coastal wetlands: Of the total wetland area of 4,201,145 ha identified in the South China Sea, around 392,416 ha is found in Viet Nam. Estuaries, lagoons, and inter-tidal flats are dominant features of Viet Nam's coasts. Significant estuarine areas include the: Balat Estuary (26,397 ha); Tien River Estuary (100,691 ha); Dong Nai River Estuary (49,711 ha); Van Uc Estuary (6,990 ha); Bach Dang Estuary (80,358 ha); and Tien Yen Estuary (24,738 ha). The priority lagoons for management include: Tam Giang-Cau Lagoon (21,600 ha); Tra O Lagoon (2,000 ha); Degi Lagoon (Binh Dinh Province) (1,600 ha); and Thi Nai lagoon (Binh Dinh Province) (5,000 ha). Of the inter-tidal flats, the Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat (60,711 ha) and Kim Son Tidal Flat (12,620 ha) are of national significance.



2.2 Threats to coastal habitats

Conversion to shrimp culture remains a potential long-term threat in Viet Nam. When mangrove forests are destroyed and replaced by alternative forms of land use, not only are the species of plants and animals lost but also many services provided by mangrove systems are lost as well. This is well recognised in Viet Nam where the function of coastal vegetation, particularly mangroves, is considered a vital service with measurable economic benefits as a protection against hurricane damage and marine based flooding. Mangrove degradation causes losses in direct and indirect economic values that support socio-economic development on both local and national scales.



Threats to coral reefs: Regionally significant threats to coral reefs in the South China Sea have been identified to include over-fishing, the use of destructive fishing techniques, pollution (mainly eutrophication) and increased sedimentation. Indirect causes of these threats are unsustainable practices in the fisheries sector, coastal development, deforestation and unsustainable tourism. Coral bleaching is also considered a serious threat to coral reefs in the region. The decadal rate of loss of coral reef from the South China Sea is estimated at 16 percent. Direct and indirect threats to coral reefs in Viet Nam are ranked in order of their significance in Table 1.

Table 1: Direct and indirect threats to coral reefs in Viet Nam (ranked order of significance)

DIRECT THREATS	INDIRECT THREATS
1. Overfishing	1. Coastal development
2. Destructive fishing	2. Deforestation of upland areas
3. Sedimentation	3. Unsustainable fisheries and aquaculture
4. Pollution (eutrophication)	4. Unsustainable tourism
5. Coral bleaching	

Threats to seagrass: The key regional six threats to seagrass, in terms of ranked significance, include: use of destructive fishing gears such as push nets and demersal trawl nets; increased sedimentation from coastal development; waste water effluent discharges; nutrient discharges and runoff; coastal construction; and over-fishing. The ongoing decadal rate of loss of seagrass at the basin wide scale is estimated at approximately 30 percent. The impacts of destructive fishing techniques are of particular concern as seagrass habitat supports extensive populations of rabbit fish, crustaceans and sea urchins of subsistence and commercial significance. In Viet Nam, the key threats to seagrass in ranked order of their significance to basin level loss of this dominant coastal habitat include:

- Destructive fishing such as push nets and trawls
- Sedimentation from coastal development
- Coastal construction

- Over-fishing
- Nutrients (eutrophication)



Threats to coastal wetlands: Major threats to the coastal wetlands of Viet Nam can be grouped as follows: loss of wetland areas through conversion for agriculture, aquaculture, port and harbor development, human settlement, tourist development, urbanization, industrialization. Wetland ecosystems are also highly degraded as a result of over-exploitation of living resources, use of inappropriate fishing techniques and gear, pollution, deforestation in upland area, invasive species, global trends and natural episodic events such as sea-level rise, typhoons.



2.3 Management of coastal habitats

Mangrove management

In Viet Nam, the total area of mangroves is 157,000 ha have been under various forms of management. Table 2 presents the estimated areas of mangrove under different forms of land-use designation and management in Viet Nam.

Table 2: Estimated areas of mangrove under different forms of land-use designation and management in Viet Nam

Land-use designation and management	Area (ha)
Total area (ha)	157,000
Production forest	18,000
Conversion	-
Parks & Protected Areas (Conservation) non-extractive use	20,000

Land-use designation and management	Area (ha)
Non-use of mangrove but extractive resource use (fish, crabs etc.)	119,000
Private land, unregulated use	-
Area currently under management Regulated in laws/regulations	155,000
Areas estimated as currently under sustainable management ¹	20,000

It is noted that in Viet Nam, areas considered as currently being sustainably managed include all lands designated as production forest (18,000 ha) as it is a legal requirement that these be replanted, and that all mangrove lands contained within National Parks and Protected Areas (20,000 ha) may be considered to be sustainably managed. Of the mangrove area (119,000 ha) used for extractive use of non-mangrove resources (e.g., fish and crabs), only 46,000 ha of this is deemed to be sustainably managed, largely due to constraints in enforcing laws and regulations governing direct use of mangrove and emerging threats associated with reclamation and infrastructure development and pollution from shrimp farming. Accordingly, 84,600 ha of the total 157,000 ha (or 54 percent) of Viet Nam's mangroves are deemed to be sustainably managed.

The key challenges in achieving sustainable management mangrove were outlined in Viet Nam's National Action Plan for mangroves as follows: a lack of policy tools and specific regulations guiding the fishery and other economic sectors in utilization of mangrove forests; poor understanding or perception among policy makers about mangrove ecosystems; lack of a sound and empowered inter-sectoral land-use planning, including mangrove land-use, at local levels (both at provincial and district levels); limited human resource capacity for mangrove management; and weak national systems for resource assessment and monitoring. Accordingly,

In term of policies related to mangrove management, Circular No. 26/2015/TT-BNNPTNT dated 29 July 2015 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development which outlines consultative procedures for engaging with affected stakeholders on planned reforestation initiatives. Significantly, Decision No. 17/2015/QĐ-TTg dated 09 June 2015 of the Prime Minister of Viet Nam on the promulgation of the regulations for the management of protective forests aims to enable the development of legal frameworks to ensure effective management of mangroves from the perspective of disaster risk reduction. In this connection, Decree No. 40/2015/NĐ-CP dated 27 April 2015 of the Government of Viet Nam defines fines and remedial actions required by individuals or organizations found to have unlawfully degraded a mangrove forest area. Additionally, Circular No. 38/2014/TT-BNNPTNT dated 03 November 2014 of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development provides the policy foundation for the development and implementation of management plans for the sustainable management of mangrove areas. Linked to this are Decision No. 1206/QĐ-BNN-TCLN, Decision No. 1205/QĐ-BNN-TCLN dated 08 April 2016, and Letter No. 3390/BNN-TCLN dated 28 April 2016 which cover: cost norms and engineering guidelines for mangrove reforestation and arrangements for national, provincial, and local government cooperation in sustainably managing priority mangrove areas. Management actions have largely focused on piloting community-based approaches and stakeholder awareness program.

Recognize the importance of the mangrove forest, the Government of Viet Nam and the provincial governments of coastal provinces have developed and enacted many legal documents on conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable development of mangrove forest. Almost all contents of the National action plan for protection and development of Viet Nam mangrove forest until 2015 have been implemented with considerable success. Especially, many destroyed mangrove forests in the Mekong Delta and other parts of the country have been restored through reforestation efforts. Models of community-based management of coastal mangrove forest have been developed and applied at HaiPhong, Nam Dinh, SocTrang, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, KienGiang and other provinces. The extensive aquaculture models in Ca Mau and Nam Dinh, which allows exchange of tidal water between aquaculture pools and outside. Despite protection efforts, the mangrove forest in Viet Nam is still under degradation. This is due to coastal erosion resulted from the decrease in muddy sediment supply to the coast, land reclamation and other socio-economic activity.

¹ Areas considered as currently being sustainably managed include all lands designated as production forest; all mangrove lands contained within National Parks and Protected Areas; and a proportion of the mangrove area subject to extractive use of non-timber resources.

Coral reef management

Following the data available until 2008, the known reef area of 9 coral reef sites of Viet Nam was only 5,570 ha compared with a total area of 110,000 ha (Burke et al., 2011). Significant coral reef sites are located in Ca Na Bay, Ninh Hai and Con Dao. Table 3 presents the status of management at these 9 coral reef sites.

Table 3: Management status of priority coral reef sites of the Strategic Action Programme in Viet Nam

Site name	Area (ha)	Live coral cover (%)	Management legal status	Area under management (ha)	Management effectiveness ²
Viet Nam	110,000			2,270	
Cu Lao Cham	200	34	MPA	100	Medium
Nha Trang bay	570	26	MPA	100	Medium
Con Dao	1,000	23	National Park	1,000	Medium
Phu Quoc	600	42	Proposed MPA	0	-
Ninh Hai	1,070	37	Proposed MPA & Community-based Management	1,070	Medium
Ca Na bay	2,270	41	Proposed MPA	0	-
Ha Long–Cat Ba	N/A	43	World Heritage & National Park	0	Medium
Hai Van–Son Tra	N/A	51	Proposed MPA	0	-
Bach Long VI	N/A	22	Proposed MPA	0	-

Of the total coral reef area of 5,770 ha known at 9 sites, it is estimated that 40 percent (2,270 ha) is under some form of management. While management information is available for all nine sites, only five sites are being managed, with the effectiveness of that management being rated as medium.

On policies, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam issued Decision No. 742/2010/QĐ-TTg on the approval of planning of the system of marine protected areas of Viet Nam. Additionally, Circular No. 23/2010/TT-BTNMT dated 26 October 2010 of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment presents guidance on national protocols for the conduct of field surveys for coral reefs and other dominant coastal habitats. It is noted that several provinces have promulgated provincial governor decisions on coral reef conservation, protection and the sustainable use of coral reefs.

To date, 9 MPAs for coral reef management have been established and are operational. At some MPAs, such as Hon Mun and Cu Lao Cham, pilot models of community-based management of MPAs, especially for the protection and conservation of coral reefs, have been tested. Although to date, there has been minimal replication or scaling-up of these approaches. Ecotourism has also been tested at these sites, and while the potential for expansion in this area is significant, there are needs for models that relate to sustainable financing and embrace a human rights-based approach to the distribution of the benefits associated with private sector tourism operations. Despite these recent advancements, coral reefs at most MPA sites continue to degrade as a result of low effectiveness of management and enforcement. On May 31, 2007, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam issued the Decision No. 79/2007/QĐ-TTg on the arrival of the National action plan for biodiversity towards 2010, vision 2020 for the implementation of Convention on Biodiversity and Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

² Categories of Management Effectiveness: Low: Area declared or proposed to be declared for management; Management Plan developed and approved. Medium: Existing Management Framework is implemented with inadequacy of manpower, finance and/or equipment; High: Existing Management Framework is implemented with enough trained manpower, equipment, facilities and sustainable finance.

The Decision has facilitated the implementation of conservation and sustainable development of coral reefs in Viet Nam including the need to develop, approve and implement a national action plan on protection and sustainable development of coral reefs in Viet Nam.



Seagrass management

In Viet Nam, data available until 2008 indicated six important known seagrass sites with a total area of 13,503 ha of which 2,340 ha are under some form of management. The areas and status of management at these sites is summarized in Table 4. Management effectiveness at most sites ranked lower than medium, even unknown.

Table 4: Status of known seagrass sites in Viet Nam’s coastal waters

Name	Area (ha)	Legal Status	Area under Management	Management Effectiveness
Viet Nam	13,503		2,340	
Phu Quoc archipelago	4,600	Phu Quoc Marine Protected Area	2,050	Low
Con Dao Islands	200	National Park	200	Medium
Phu Qui Island	400	Proposed MPA	No	N/A
Thuy Trieu	800	Proposed MPA	50	N/A

Name	Area (ha)	Legal Status	Area under Management	Management Effectiveness
Tam Giang	2,000	Proposed Ramsar	No	N/A
Cu Lao Cham	40	MPA	40	Medium

The seagrass in Viet Nam continue to decrease due mainly to causes such as coastal development, pollution, sea bottom sand mining and climate change. The weak enforcement of MPA regulations continue to decrease seagrass areas in Viet Nam. Many contents of the National action plan for protection, restoration and development of the seagrass ecological system towards 2012 and vision 2020 have been implemented with certain success. The Government of Viet Nam, through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, has spent considerable efforts on the protection and conservation of sea grass ecological systems. However, little has been achieved in strengthening the enabling environment for seagrass management, which is largely done within the context of MPA management with little attention being given to actions required to address the threats specific to seagrass. Indeed, threats associated with destructive and inappropriate fishing practices are yet to be addressed. It is necessary to revise the National action plan for protection, restoration and development of the seagrass ecological system towards 2012 and vision 2020 and get it approved and implemented to protect, restore and sustainable development of the seagrass ecological systems.

Coastal wetland management

In Viet Nam, the total area of wetlands is 392,416 ha with three types of wetlands as follows: estuaries (288,885 ha), lagoons (30,200 ha) and inter-tidal flats (73,331 ha). Table 5 presents the areas and management status of wetlands types in Viet Nam.

Table 5 Legal and management status of known inter-tidal mudflats, estuaries, coastal lagoons and coastal peat swamps in Viet Nam.

Name of site	Area (ha)	Legal and Management Status		
		Protected – Non-use (Subsistence/commercial)	Sustainable use	Non-sustainable use
Estuaries				
Balat Estuary	26,397	National Park and National Nature Reserve	N.A.	N.A.
Tien River Estuary	100,691	Than Phu Nature Reserve – small part of the estuary	N.A.	√
Dong Nai River Estuary	49,711	Can Gio Biosphere Reserve	N.A.	√
Van Uc Estuary	6,990	N.A.	N.A.	√
Bach Dang Estuary	80,358	N.A.	N.A.	√
Tien Yen Estuary	24,738	N.A.	N.A.	√
Lagoons				
Tam Giang-Cau Lagoon	21,600	N.A.	N.A.	√
Tra O Lagoon	2,000	N.A.	N.A.	√
Degi Lagoon (Binh Dinh Province)	1,600	N.A.	N.A.	√
Thi Nai lagoon (Binh Dinh Province)	5,000	N.A.	N.A.	√
Inter-tidal flats				
Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat	60,711	National Park	N.A.	N.A.
Kim Son Tidal Flat	12,620	N.A.	N.A.	√

Recognize the importance of the coastal wetland, many contents of the National strategic action plan for conservation and sustainable development of Viet Nam coastal wetland until 2015 have been implemented. The conservation of coastal wetland is implemented mainly through implementation of coastal protection against erosion, implementation of the Decision No. 79/2007/QĐ-TTg of the Prime Minister of Viet Nam on the arrival of the National action plan for biodiversity towards 2010, vision 2020 for the implementation of Convention on Biodiversity and Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety; and Viet Nam Biodiversity Law and Fishery Law; and Law on Sea and Island Natural Resources and Environment.

Despite of efforts, ecological systems in the coastal wetlands in Viet Nam are continuing to be degraded. The main causes of coastal wetland ecological system degradation are overfishing and destructed fishing, coastal wetland development, coastal erosion and pollution. To protect and sustainable develop coastal wetland, it is necessary to revise, approve and implement the National strategic action plan for conservation and sustainable development of Viet Nam coastal wetland until 2020, vision 2030.

3 SAP NATIONAL TARGETS AND PLANED ACTIONS

3.1 Mangroves

The Strategic Action Programme targets for mangroves in Viet Nam focus on: improving the management of mangrove areas utilized for the sustainable use of non-mangrove resources. This will be achieved via the development and implementation of sustainable use management plans for 50,000 ha of mangroves, as well as the reform of laws and regulations for the sustainable use of mangrove areas in Viet Nam. This aims to increase the total area of mangrove being managed effectively on a sustainable use basis from 84,600 ha to 134,600. The Strategic Action Programme targets also focus on increasing the area of mangrove designated as a National Park or assigned Protected Area status from 20,000 to 50,000 ha. It will also result in the replanting of 8,000 ha of deforested mangrove land and the enrichment planting of a further 2,000 ha of mangrove to increase biodiversity. Priority areas for management include Tien Yen, Xuan Thuy, Can Gio and Ca Mau. Table 6 details the specific Strategic Action Programme targets for mangrove in Viet Nam.

Table 6. Summary of Mangrove SAP Targets and Sites

Output	Proposed sites	Baseline/Target (has)
1.1.1 Declaration of 57,400 ha of mangrove as National Parks and Protected Areas	Tien Yen Xuan Thuy Can Gio Ca Mau	30,000
1.1.2 Designation and plans for the management of 166,600 ha of mangrove as non-conversion, sustainable use areas*		0*
1.1.3 Reform of laws and regulations for the sustainable use of 602,800 ha of mangrove forest		50,000
1.1.4 Replanting of 21,000 ha of deforested mangrove land		8,000
1.1.5 Biodiversity increased for 11,200 ha of mangrove forest via enrichment planting		2,000
1.1.6 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 26 sites [based on SAP results framework]		N/A
	TOTAL	90,000

*Note that according to the SAP and SCS SAP project document, Viet Nam will not execute activities for 1.1.2 Designation and plans for the management of mangrove as non-conversion, sustainable use areas

NAP implementation will focus on revision of institutional structures, policy frameworks regulatory frameworks for mangrove management in Viet Nam, and the strengthening of capacities at provincial and local levels for evidence-based land-use planning.



3.2 Coral reefs

The targeted coral reef area to be added for management through SAP implementation is 3,300 ha, bringing the total area across the nine sites under management to 5,570 ha. The implementation of the Strategic Action Programme also aims to increase the management effectiveness across all nine sites from non-existing and/or medium to high. Table 7 presents the summary of SAP targets and sites for coral reef in Viet Nam.

Table 7. Summary of Coral Reef SAP Targets and Sites

Output	Proposed sites	Baseline/Target (has)
1.2.1 Management capacity (number/levels human resources, facilities and equipment, and sustainable financing mechanisms) built for 46 coral reef sites	Cu Lao Cham Nha Trang bay Con Dao Phu Quoc Ninh Hai Ca Na bay Ha Long - Cat Ba Hai Van - Son Tra Bach Long Vi	5,570
1.2.2 Management approaches and policy, legal & institutional reforms (integrated, community-based, multiple use) improved at 46 coral reef sites		
1.2.3 Management tools (licensing and permit systems, seasonal closures, zoning) developed and utilized to address key threats at priority sites		
1.2.4 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 46 sites [based on SAP results framework]		
	TOTAL	5,570

The National Action Plan for coral reefs in Viet Nam focused on: establishing legislation and institutional arrangements for effective nation-wide coral reef management; increase awareness of managers and communities on the ecological roles and economic values of coral reefs to gain support for coral reef conservation and management; and establishing institutional arrangements for coral reef management.

At the site and national levels, activities will include: supporting building management capacity (number/levels human resources, facilities and equipment, and sustainable financing mechanisms) for the 9 coral reef sites; improving management approaches (integrated, community-based, multiple use) at 9 coral reef sites; developing management tools (licensing and permit systems, seasonal closures, zoning) in support of legal and regulatory reforms to address key threats at the 9 priority sites; and establishing mechanisms for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at the 9 coral reef sites. These are all aimed at increasing management effectiveness and assisting in achieving the coral reef related target of the Strategic Action Programme which is aimed at reducing the decadal loss of live coral cover in the South China Sea from 16 to 5 percent.

3.3 Seagrass

The Strategic Action Programme targets four seagrass sites and will result in an increase in seagrass area under management by 4,550 ha. The four sites are located at: the Phu Quoc archipelago; Con Dao Islands; Thuy Trieu; and Tam Giang. One seagrass site, Phu Quoc Archipelago, is a Fisheries Refugia project site. Table 8 presents the summary of SAP targets and sites for seagrass in Viet Nam.

Table 8. Summary of Seagrass SAP Targets and Sites

Output	Proposed sites	Target (ha)
1.3.1 Twenty-one seagrass areas totaling 15,848 ha under sustainable management with supporting laws and regulations	Phu Quoc archipelago (3,000 ha) Con Dao Islands (200 ha)) Thuy Trieu (350 ha) and Tam Giang lagoons (1,000)	4,550
1.3.2 Amended management plans for 7 existing MPAs with significant seagrass areas, to include specific seagrass-related management actions and policy, legal & institutional reforms		
1.3.3 Designation of 7 new Marine Protected Areas focusing on seagrass areas		
1.3.4 Established mechanism for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 20 sites		

Specific national activities will include putting under sustainable management with supporting laws and regulations four seagrass, amending national management plans for existing MPAs with significant seagrass areas, to include specific seagrass-related management actions, designating new Marine Protected Areas focusing on seagrass areas identified in the prioritized listings of the SCS Project and establishing mechanisms for monitoring management, ecological and socio-economic indicators at 6 sites. As a result of a focus of Viet Nam’s National Action Plan for seagrass on raising stakeholder awareness of the importance of seagrass ecosystems and building the scientific basis for mapping, little has been achieved to date in strengthening the enabling environment for seagrass management.



3.4 Coastal wetlands

The Strategic Action Programme implementation will result in the adoption and implementation of management plans for: 2 coastal lagoons - Tamgiang-Cauhai (21,600 ha) and Thi Nai (5,000 ha); 3 estuaries – Balat (26,397 ha), Tien River Estuary (100,691) and Dong Nai River Estuary (49,711 ha); and 1 tidal mudflat at Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat (60,711 ha). This includes the declaration of wetland areas with protection status and needed management reforms, and adoption of a regional estuary monitoring scheme for national implementation. Table 9 presents the summary of SAP targets and sites for wetland in Viet Nam.

Table 9. Summary of Wetland SAP Targets and Sites

Output	Proposed sites	Baseline/Target (has)
1.4.1 Integrated management plans developed and under implementation for at least 3 lagoons (26,818 ha), 9 estuaries (614,680 ha), 5 tidal flats (96,903 ha), 1 peat swamp (45,700 ha) and 1 non-peat swamp (9,808 ha) and associated policy, legal and institutional reforms	Tam Giang Lagoon Thi Nai Lagoon Balat Estuary Tien River Estuary	264,110 (2 lagoons – 26,600 ha, 3 estuaries – 176,799 ha and 1 tidal flats – 60,711 ha)
1.4.2 Declaration of at least 7 wetland areas with protection status (i.e. non-hunting area, nature reserves, protected areas, Ramsar Sites).	Dong Nai River Estuary Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat	
1.4.3 Adoption of a regional estuary monitoring scheme and its national implementation [based on SAP results framework]		
	TOTAL	264,110



2.5 Land-based pollution

National level activities will support the: reviews of legislative and institutional frameworks for land-based pollution management in participating countries; harmonization of national Standard Operating Procedures for land-based pollution control and management, including agreed sediment, biota, and water quality criteria; revision of national/provincial policies; development, enactment and implementation of supporting regulations for land-based pollution; and the updating and adoption of National Action Plans, including institutional reform and sustainable financing strategies, for land-based pollution management in the SCS.

Viet Nam's National Action Plan on land-based pollution identified ranked the following sources in order of their significance and the challenges faced in their effective management: solid waste; effluent from intensive coastal aquaculture; domestic waste; agricultural/rural waste; oil pollution industrial waste; sedimentation and erosion; and ship-based pollution. It also identified that institutionally, a number of weaknesses exist in that the legal, monitoring and operational capacities of pollution control agencies are low. Similarly, the National Action Plan (NAP) identified that, efforts to convince the private sector to internalize the environmental cost of coastal and marine degradation due to polluting activities is constrained by lack of a broadly accepted National Investment Planning approach to land-based pollution management. Similarly, capacities and financial resources for the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessments across the wide range of polluting sources have also been low. Also general public awareness on the effects of environmental pollution was

The NAP identified ambitious goals to: “reduce pollution from all sources of origins in order to maintain marine environmental quality within standards” and “to undertake the institutional and regulatory reforms required to enable more effective control and management of land-based pollution”. Agreed actions included: the establishment of a vertically integrated governance approach, with supporting laws and regulations in marine pollution control; efforts to prepare pollution inventories and to conduct audits; collaborate multi-laterally to identify and address land-based pollution issues of a transboundary nature; strengthening capacities for the collection and treatment of solid waste in big coastal urban areas; develop solutions for hazardous waste management in three economic zones; and the control pollution in rivers and coastal waters, caused by economic activities (industry, agriculture, transport, fisheries, mining and tourism) .

The key outcome from the institutional and legal reform activities of National Action Plan implementation was the revision of the Law of Environmental Protection in January 2015 to accommodate strengthened control and management of land-based pollution. Supporting provisions providing a legal basis for the conduct of Environmental Impact Assessment has enabled substantial reduction in the risks of marine pollution from production sites. These legal reforms have also enabled action and investment in identifying and remediating sources of land-based pollution. Solid wastes at several hotspots have been collected for proper disposal, and a much higher percentage of liquid wastes are being treated prior to at-sea disposal. Accordingly, many important coastal areas such as Da Nang and Ha Long have significantly improved water quality, which have reduced

public health risks at these sites while improving the capacity from the perspective of coastal and marine-based tourism in Viet Nam.



4 NATIONAL BASELINE INFORMATION AND DATA

4.1 National reports and publications

During implementing the SCS Project, the detailed national reports on mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass, wetlands, land-based pollution and economic valuation of Viet Nam were prepared as a baseline resource for Strategic Action Programme implementation as well as good practices on habitat and transboundary management³.

Table 10. Past national reports and publications in Viet Nam

Component	Title	Date	Focal Point/Institution
Mangroves	National Action Plan for Protection and Development of Viet Nam's Mangrove Forest Until 2015		Vu Tan Phuong Research Center for Forest Ecology and Environment
	Mangroves National Report (Tong Quan Rung Ngap Man)		
Coral Reefs	National report on Coral Reefs in Viet Nam	2004	Nguyen Van Long Institute of Oceanography
	National Action Plan for coral reef management in Viet Nam		
	Coral Reefs of Viet Nam (He Sinh Thai Ran San Ho...)	2005	Vo Si Tuan et al.
	Monitoring of Coral Reefs in Coastal Waters of Viet Nam 1994-2007	2008	Vo Si Tuan et al., 2008
Seagrass	Metadata of Viet Nameese Seagrass	2006	Nguyen Van Tien
	Seagrass National Action Plan (Ke Hoach Hanh Dong Bao Ve)	2006	

³ Available at http://www.unepscs.org/South_China_Sea_Knowledge/Lessons_Learned/SCS_Lessons_Learned.html

Component	Title	Date	Focal Point/Institution
	Approaches to Management of Seagrass Ecosystem in Viet Nam (Tien Toi Quan Ly)		Institute of Marine Environment and Resources
	Seagrass Research Methods (Phuong Phap)		
	Seagrass Management Review (Co Bien Vung Bien Dong)		
	National Report on Seagrasses of Viet Nam	2004	
	Self-Assessment Report for Mid-Term Evaluation Demosite Project for Coral Reefs and Seagrass Beds in Phu Quoc		
	Review of Data and Information on Seagrasses of Viet Nam	2004	
Wetlands	National Strategic Action Plan for Conservation and Sustainable Development of Viet Nam Coastal Wetland Until 2015		Mai Trong Nhuan Viet Nam National University
	Coastal Wetlands National Report Dat Ngap Nuoc		
Land-based Pollution	National Proposal Plan on Land-based Pollution Control to 2010	2005	Nguyen Thi Viet Lien Center for Marine Environment Survey Research and Consultation
	Land-based Pollution National Report (Bao Cao Quoc Gia)	2004	
Fisheries	Fisheries National Action Plan (Ke Hoach Hanh Dong Cua...)	2006	Dao Manh Son Ministry of Fisheries
	Fisheries and Biodiversity Conservation (Hay Bao Ve)		
	Fisheries Science and Management Review (DU AN)		
	Fisheries National Report (Danh Ca Co)	2005	
Others	National Report of Viet Nam on the Formulation of a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Preliminary Framework of a SAP for the SCS		Kiengiang Provincial People's Committee, Viet Nam
	Transboundary Water Management between Kampot Province (Cambodia) and Kien Giang Province (Viet Nam)	2008	
	Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> as a Tool for Integrated Fisheries and Habitat Management at Phu Quoc Archipelago, Viet Nam	2008	
	Rehabilitation of Habitats and Sustainable Use of Fisheries Resources in the Con Chim Area, Thi Nai Lagoon	2008	Fisheries Department, Binh Dinh Province Viet Nam

4.2. Site characterization

Twenty sites were selected as the target sites in Viet Nam. It is noted that some of them were proposed for two thematic areas (Phu Quoc for seagrass and coral reefs), Tam Giang for seagrass and coastal wetlands) and 3 sites were also listed in the Fisheries Refugia Network (Table 11)

Comprehensive site characterization information and data were compiled and updated as a preparatory activity to establish detailed baselines for each of the abovementioned mangrove, coral reef, seagrass and wetland sites identified as priority locations for management within the framework of Strategic Action Programme implementation. The baseline assessments of the sites have been made accessible online at <http://gis.unepscs.org>.

Table 11. SCS SAP Project Sites Per Habitats of Viet Nam (with Fisheries Refugia Sites)

Mangroves	Coral Reefs	Seagrass	Wetlands	Fisheries Refugia
4 sites	9 sites	4 sites	6 sites	3 sites
90,000 ha	5,570 has	3,000 ha	264,110 ha	
Tien Yen	Cu Lao Cham	Phu Quoc archipelago	Tam Giang- Lagoon	Phu Quoc – short mackerel and anchovy
Xuan Thuy	Nha Trang bay	Con Dao Islands	Thi Nai lagoon	Binh Thuan – Frigate Tuna?
Can Gio	Con Dao	Thuy Trieu	Balat Estuary	Bach Long Vi, Haiphong
Ca Mau	Phu Quoc	Tam Giang	Tien River Estuary	Con Dao?
	Ninh Hai		Dong Nai River Estuary	
	Ca Na bay		Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat	
	Ha Long - Cat Ba			
	Hai Van - Son Tra			
	Bach Long Vi			

The data provided for site assessment during prioritization of the SCS Project indicated good availability of information at the target sites (Table 12, 13, 14, 15). All these data were quoted from “*Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand*”. South China Sea Knowledge Document No. 2. UNEP/GEF/SCS/Inf.2 in order to provide basic information of the sites.

Table 12. Selected physical and biological properties and variables of the mangrove target sites in Viet Nam

Site	Tien Yen	Xuan Thuy	Can Gio	Ca Mau
Present Area	2,537	1,775	8,958	5,239
Zones spp. assoc	2	3	3	3
% change in area	-25	98	100	60
True mangrove spp.	13	11	32	30
Density >1.5m high /Ha	7,000	9,500	6,000	7,500
% cover	60	75	80	85
No. Crustacean. spp.	51	61	28	12
No Bivalve	M	25	17	6
No. Gastropod spp.	M	30	32	15
No Fish spp.	79	90	103	36
No Bird spp.	M	31	96	18
No migratory bird spp.	M	62	34	53

Table 13. Properties and variables for potential coral reef demonstration sites in Viet Nam used in determining similarities and differences among sites. (M = data unavailable)

Site Name	Hard coral species	live coral cover (%)	No. of algae spp.	No. of crustacean species	No. of echinoder m species	No. of coral reef fish species	Other ecosystem	No. of endangered and threatened species
Cu Lao Cham	131	33.9	122	84	4	178	1	4
Nha Trang bay	351	26.4	55	69	27	222	2	3
Con Dao	250	23.3	84	110	44	202	2	4
Phu Quoc	89	42.2	98	9	32	135	2	3
Ninh Hai	197	36.9	190	24	13	147	1	4
Ca Na bay	134	40.5	163	46	26	211	1	3
Ha Long - Cat Ba	170	43	94	25	7	34	2	4
Hai Van – Son Tra	129	50.5	103	60	12	132	1	4
Bach Long Vi	99	21.7	46	16	8	46	M	2

Table 14. Biodiversity and other environmental properties and variables for selected seagrass sites in Viet Nam. (M = data unavailable)

Site Name	Area (ha)	% cover	Depth range	Seagrass spp.	Penaeid spp.	Gastropod spp.	Siganid spp.	Urchin spp	Threatened spp.	Associated ecosystems	Migratory species
Bai Bon, Phu Quoc Is	2,000	70	6	7	3	46	1	3	5	2	2
Rach Vem, Phu Quoc Is	900	65	6	6	3	30	1	3	3	2	2
Con Dao Island	200	25	9.6	10	8	45	1	3	4	2	4
Phu Qui Island	300	50	2.5	6	2	35	3	3	3	2	2
Thuy Trieu (Khan Hoa)	800	60	1	7	4	10	3	2	4	2	0

Table 15. Final agreed properties and variables used for the cluster analysis of wetland potential demonstration sites in Viet Nam. (M = data unavailable)

Site	Area (ha)	Total no. fish spp.	Total no. birds spp.	No. wetland types	No. migratory spp.	Site specific endemic spp.
Balat Estuary	26,397	130	181	2	136	6
Tien River Estuary	100,691	155	41	3	20	2
Dong Nai River Estuary	49,711	155	130	2	22	5
Van Uc Estuary	6,990	123	118	2	90	2
Bach Dang Estuary	80,358	117	153	2	25	5
Tien Yen Estuary	24,738	82	57	2	31	5
Ca Mau Southwest Tidal Flat	60,711	147	171	2	27	3
Tam Giang Lagoon	21,600	171	73	3	35	5
Tra O Lagoon	2,000	67	55	3	25	3
Degi Lagoon (Binh Dinh Province)	1,600	105	40	2	25	2
Thi Nai lagoon (Binh Dinh Province)	5,000	119	37	3	25	2

5. NATIONAL COORDINATION ARRANGEMENTS

5.1 National inter-ministry committee

The National Inter-Ministry Committee (IMC) for Viet Nam will be revitalized and assume overarching responsibility for Strategic Action Programme implementation in Viet Nam. The IMC will review and approve reports from the National Technical Working Group and the Specialized Executing Agencies for mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass, wetlands, land-based pollution, and economic valuation regarding the outputs and outcomes of efforts to achieve Strategic Action Programme targets. Viet Nam's IMC will meet on a biannual basis during the operational phase of SAP implementation to guide the timely execution of national-level activities. The IMC will be chaired by Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment as the lead national agency and will have as members all other relevant agencies and ministries.

Proposed Inter-Ministry Committee Members include:

- Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
- Ministry of Planning and Investment
- Ministry of Finance
- Ministry of Transport
- Ministry of Science and Technology
- Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism
- Ministry of Education and Training
- Viet Nam Academy of Science and Technology
- Viet Nam Academy of Science and Technology
- Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands
- Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands

5.2 National technical working group

Viet Nam's National Technical Working Groups (NTWG) will review and co-ordinate national scientific and technical activities of Strategic Action Programme implementation. The NTWG will review and evaluate, from a scientific and technical perspective, progress in the achievement of Strategic Action Programme targets, and provide guidance for improvement when necessary. The NTWG will provide the IMC with: recommendations on proposed national and site-based activities, work plans, and budgets; technical guidance and suggestions to improve Strategic Action Programme activities where necessary, including the reform of policy, legislation and institutional arrangements; facilitate co-operation with relevant national and provincial organizations and projects to enhance the information and science base for use in achieving Strategic Action Programme targets and in preparing updated National Action Plans and a revised Strategic Action Programme in Viet Nam; and compile and evaluate national level sources of information and data for sharing at the regional level. The NTWG will be chaired by the lead national agency and will have as members the National Focal Points or Chairpersons of the Specialized Executing Agencies (SEAs) and all other relevant ministries and agencies deemed necessary.

Proposed National Technical Working Group Members will include:

- Department of International Cooperation and Science Technology, Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands
- Department of International Cooperation and Science Technology, Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands
- Department of Policy and Legislation, Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands
- Institute of Oceanography

- Viet Nam Institute of Seas and Islands
- Mangrove Ecosystem Research Centre (MERC)
- Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment
- Institute of Marine Resources and Environment
- Center for Hydrology
- Department of International Cooperation and Science – Technology, Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands
- Institute of Marine Environment and Resources

5.3 Specialized executing agencies

National Specialized Executing Agencies (SEAs) will be engaged by UNOPS and assume overall responsibility for the execution of the national-level activities in their respective areas of expertise for Strategic Action Programme implementation in accordance with the initiative’s results framework. The SEAs will convene quarterly meetings of national committees for mangroves, coral reefs, seagrass, wetlands, land-based pollution, and economic valuation, and will nominate a National Focal Point to: (a) act as the main point of contact with the SCS Project Coordination Unit (PCU); (b) act as Chair of the his/her respective National Committee; (c) act as a member of NTWG; and (d) act as a member of the respective Regional Working Group or Task Force. The SEAs will also plan and implement activities aimed at achieving the national-level goals and targets Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea. In doing so, the SEAs will engage with national networks to the fullest extent possible, and establish institutional linkages with provincial and local governments and communities. The National Committee will be a core group of this engagement, including representatives from organizations and experts which are related to each thematic area. List of SEAs was proposed as follows:

- Mangroves: Mangrove Ecosystem Research Centre (MERC)
- Coral Reefs: Institute of Oceanography, Nha Trang
- Seagrass: Institute of Marine Environment and Resources (IMER), Vietnamese Academy of Science and Technology, Haiphong
- Wetlands: Research Institute of Seas and Islands
- Land-Based Pollution: Center for Integrated Coastal Planning and Management for Northern Area, VASI / Center for Integrated Coastal Planning and Management for Southern Area, VASI
- Economic Valuation: Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment



5.4 Stakeholder participation

The Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea emphasizes a high degree of provincial/local government and community participation in its implementation. This will involve, for example, community participation in the identification of Terms of Reference and membership for community-based management committees at the sites where management plans will be developed and implemented. Intensive consultation processes will also be undertaken to identify key threats at priority areas, agree upon management measures,

and to facilitate high-levels of provincial/local government and community stakeholder ownership of management plan development and formal endorsement. In support of local implementation of the management plans, national committees and National Technical Working Groups will be engaged in supporting governments and communities in the design of awareness programmes, development of local networks of management practitioners, and capturing and sharing information about the results and best practices generated at these sites.

A range of other mechanisms to facilitate stakeholder input and participation are included in the programme of work for SAP implementation. These include: the operation of consultative processes in support of the updating and Ministerial adoption of a revised Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme for the SCS marine basin, including prioritization of national management actions to address climate variability and change; knowledge exchanges between government and the scientific community through biennial Regional Scientific Conferences; best practice exchanges between local government officials and coastal managers on science-based management via annual Mayor's Round-Table meetings; coordination with the UNEP/GEF fisheries refugia initiative and other GEF-financed initiatives operating in the East Asian Seas, including PEMSEA; and the operation of an award program on best practices in coastal habitat and land-based pollution management for communities, local governments and industry.

Mechanisms to further facilitate NGO, CSO, and CO participation in Strategic Action Programme implementation include: the revitalization of cooperative arrangements with GEF SGP in the commissioning and implementation of community-level initiatives in support of the achievement of SAP targets, including those relating to reforestation and enrichment planting at priority mangrove sites. Annual NGO forums will also be convened to elicit CSO and CO inputs to planning, and monitoring and evaluation, of the SCS-SGP partnership. Similar processes will be operated to engage the private sector in identify opportunities for private sector investment (e.g. oil and gas, fisheries, tourism) in implementation of an updated Strategic Action Programme. The planning of cooperation between governments and the private sector for the implementation of the updated Strategic Action Programme will be facilitated via the operation of partnership forums.

In Viet Nam, the Viet Nam Administration of Seas and Islands of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment will lead national-level coordination and execution of the project. Other important stakeholders to be involved in coordination, governance reform and planning include the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development which encompasses fisheries, the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, the Ministry of Education and Training, and the Viet Nameese Academy of Science and Technology and its Institute of Oceanography.

The full capacities of these line agencies will be harnessed in support of the scientific and technical aspects of the project. Other institutions that will act as key stakeholders for this aspect of the project include the Mangrove Ecosystem Research Centre, the Viet Nameese Academy of Science and Technology's Institute of Oceanography (particularly its Department of Marine Botany) and Institute of Marine Environment and Resources, and the Viet Nam's Administration of Seas and Islands' Centers for Integrated Coastal Planning and Management (both northern and southern centers), Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment, and Department of International Cooperation and Science Technology. Academic institutes to be engaged as stakeholders include the Viet Nam National University, the Department of Environmental Economics and Management of the National Economics University of Viet Nam, the Center for Environmental Research and Education of the Hanoi University of Education, and the Faculty of Geology at the Hanoi University of Science.

The offices of Viet Nam's coastal provincial governments are key stakeholders, again providing an important 'community to cabinet' conduit between complex sub-provincial administrative units. Coastal provincial governments, are typically comprised provincial departments of environment and natural resources, fisheries, tourism, agriculture and rural development, planning and investment, science and technology, and police. Administratively, provinces are divided into districts, provincial cities, and district-level towns, commune-level towns and communes. Municipalities are further divided into rural districts and urban districts, which are further subdivided into wards. CSOs, COs and NGOs play an important role in capturing community level inputs and some of these identified during project preparation include district level farmers' associations, ward

level women's associations, provincial unions of science and technology associations, provincial level fisheries associations, town level youth unions, and provincial forestry clubs.

In implementing the demonstration site activities of the SCS project each responsible organization was required to establish a cross-sectorial management board Chaired by the Mayor or Provincial Governor or their Deputy. Membership of the board included representatives from all sectors of government involved in the use of coastal space, local stakeholder groups including the community, and where appropriate non-governmental and scientific organizations. Almost without exception this proved to be extremely valuable in mobilizing additional and unplanned actions and resources and the model has now been adopted by several agencies as a standard model for project coordination. The mainstreaming of gender and youth into such coordinating bodies will be emphasized through this project.

6. NEXT STEPS

During 2020-2021 National Implementation Reports (NIR) will be developed to elaborate for each of the SCS SAP Outcomes and Outputs the activities to be executed in each site in order to achieve the SAP targets. This will include updated information and adjustments to address current status of SAP implementation since 2008 and revision of sites and planned activities if appropriate. The NIR will also include a detailed workplan and budget including partnerships and co-financing, to be adopted by the SCS SAP Project Steering Committee.