



**Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting for
the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Project on Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries
Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand**

11th – 13th September 2018
Trat Province (Fisheries Refugia Site), Thailand

REPORT OF THE PROJECT DIRECTOR ON ACTIVITIES DURING NOV. 2016 – JUN. 2018

I. INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea is a global center of shallow water marine biological diversity that supports significant fisheries that are important to food security and export incomes of the Southeast Asian countries. Consequently, all inshore waters of the South China Sea basin are subject to intense fishing pressure. With fish production being intrinsically linked to the quality and area of habitats and the heightened dependence of coastal communities on fish, a need exists to improve the integration of fish habitat considerations and fisheries management in the region.

Taking into consideration the aforementioned circumstances, SEAFDEC/Training Department (TD) embarked in 2016 a 5-year project “Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” with the specific objective of “*operating and expanding the network of fisheries refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand for improved management of fisheries and critical marine habitats linkages in order to achieve the medium and longer-term goals of the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea.*”

II. PROJECT INCEPTION WORKSHOP

To start-off, the “Project Inception Meeting” was organized on 1-3 November 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand to introduce and discuss the Project goals, objectives, management framework, strategy, and plan, in order to enhance the understanding of concerned countries on the Project implementation. Initially, information and data collection would be undertaken on fisheries and coastal habitats of 14 priority fisheries *refugia* sites to serve as basis for conducting future activities, *e.g.* facilitating agreement among stakeholders on the boundaries of fisheries *refugia*; developing Community-Based Management Plans for the sites; establishing operational management for the sites; and strengthening the participation of civil society and community organizations in the management of these 14 fisheries *refugia* sites. Subsequently, activities would continue on improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledge-base for fisheries *refugia* management in the South China Sea.

III. PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION

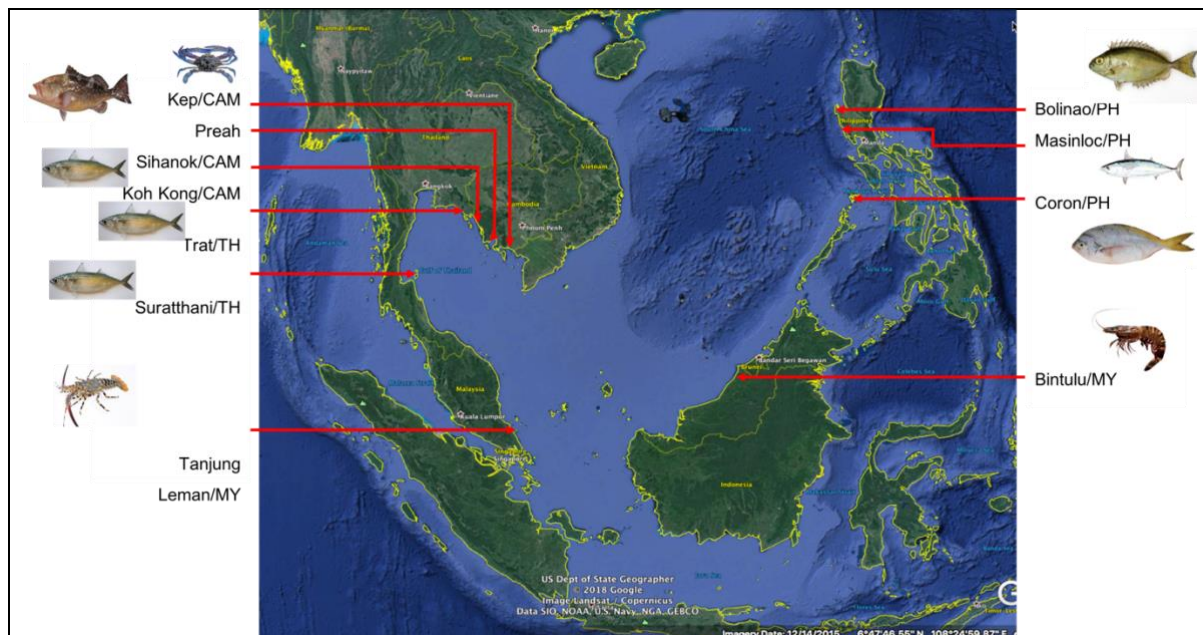
1) LOA/LOI Signing

To proceed on the project implementation during the year 2017, Letters of Agreement were signed with four out of the six participating countries, namely: Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand; while for Indonesia and Viet Nam, this is still under process. The delay for LOA signing by Indonesia and Viet Nam are due to government policy change. Nevertheless, in August 2018, the national focal point for Viet Nam request for Letter of Intent (LOI) prepared by the PCU. It is expected that Viet Nam will sign the LOI soon.

2) Selection of Fisheries *Refugia* Sites

To date, a total of ten priority fisheries *refugia* sites have been identified (see details from the Map) and implemented in four countries as follows:

- a) **Cambodia:** Kep Province - for blue swimming crab *refugia* in sea grass area; Preah Sihanouk Province for juvenile grouper *refugia* in the coral reef area of Koh Rong Archipelago; and Koh Kong Province - for Indo-Pacific mackerel in transboundary area with Trat Province of Thailand;
- b) **Thailand:** Trat Province - for Indo-Pacific Mackerel in transboundary area with Koh Kong Province of Cambodia; and Samui Archipelago in Surat Thani Province - for Indo-Pacific mackerel *refugia*.
- c) **Philippines:** Bolinao, Pangasinan - for siganus *refugia* in very large sea grass area; Masinloc, Zambales - for juveniles of Frigate tuna (*Auxis* spp.) *refugia*; and Coron, Palawan - for fusilier fish *refugia* in coral reef area, and mud crab *refugia* in mangrove area, and
- d) **Malaysia:** Tanjung Leman, Johorbahru – for spiny lobster *refugia*; and Bintulu, Sarawak – for tiger prawn *refugia*.



Map of the Fisheries *Refugia* Sites in 4 Countries (based on 2017 activities)

3) Participation to the National, Regional and International Fora

Site Level Inception Workshops and Baseline Data Collection were conducted in 2017 for three *refugia* sites in the Philippines, while Stakeholders Consultation Workshops were organized in Kep and Koh Kong Provinces of Cambodia. From the activities carried out in 2017, major achievements had been attained. These included:

- a) intensive series of consultations on the boundaries of fisheries *refugia* which have been supported by facilitated processes to identify key threats to fisheries *refugia* sites and initiate discussion about possible management measures for evaluation, *i.e.* governance reviews, stakeholder analyses, socio-economic information and data collation, and reviews of existing management arrangements that are still underway;
- b) improvement of the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledge-base for fisheries *refugia* management in the South China Sea, *i.e.* development of working document for regional level review on key threats from fishing and the environment to fish stock and critical habitat linkages at the priority sites in the participating countries; existing regulations and by-laws in the areas of the ten (10) sites where the project is presently working, compiled and reviewed with feedback provided to national teams to aid in the formulation of recommendations on policy and legal reforms to support promotion of responsible fishing at times and at locations critical to fish stock and critical habitat linkages; workshops with local stakeholders and officials on policy and legal aspects of *refugia* (terminology, procedures, recommended reforms) in the participating countries that allowed discussions viewed through a more realistic lens to reflect the local stakeholders' needs, expectations, and concerns about

socio-economic impacts of management; questionnaire survey templates prepared to: (a) compile and update information and data on the distribution of habitats, known spawning areas, locations of *refugia*, MPAs, fisheries management areas, and critical habitats for endangered species; (b) produce detailed site characterizations for the 14 priority fisheries *refugia* sites for incorporation into national and regional datasets, and preparation of detailed Terms of Reference for the development and application of a modeling system linking oceanographic, biochemical, and fish early life history information to improve regional understanding of fish early life history and links to critical habitats and discussion with regional universities, and internationally-recognized institutions with expertise in this field;

- c) information management and dissemination in support of national and regional-level implementation of the fisheries *refugia* concept in the South China Sea, *i.e.* the www.fisheries-refugia.org web portal established and populated with newly developed short films, and journal articles written by regional project staff, all supported by various social media platforms including YouTube and Facebook, and a six-part short film social media campaign prepared and disseminated in December 2017; and
- d) national cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea were enhanced through the signing of Letters of Agreement with four out of the six participating countries, training of national teams in project management and governance arrangements, and following up on the progress of establishing agreements in ten out of 14 sites including the detailed terms of reference for site-based management boards.

During the year 2018, The PCU had undertaken a series of country visit to supporting national lead agency for the project in undertaking quarterly and annual project work planning, budgeting and reporting. The support mission was started from National Fisheries Research and Development Institute, Philippine, Fisheries Administration Cambodia, Department of Fisheries of Thailand, and Department of Fisheries of Malaysia, respectively. Also, The PCU's staffs participated SEAFDEC regional meetings with aimed to strength the project cooperation and coordination with other SEAFDEC Donors such as; the Experts Consultation Workshop on Guidance to Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender Equality and Social Well-being, and the participation to the 2nd Sub-Regional Technical Meeting on Effective Fisheries Management between Cambodia and Thailand. The summarize of the activities done by the PCU during November 2016 to August 2018 were shown in Table 1.



Fisheries Refugia Project Inception Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand on 1-3 November 2016



Site Level Inception Workshop and Baseline Data Collection in Bolinao, Pangasinan, Philippines on 23-25 March 2017



Site Level Inception Workshop and Baseline Data Collection in Coron, Palawan, Philippines on 23-25 March 2017



Site Level Inception Workshop and Baseline Data Collection in Masinloc, Zambales, Philippines on 23-25 March 2017



A Support Mission by Project Coordinating Unit in Cambodia, 18-20 July 2018(Left), A Support Mission by Project Coordinating Unit in Philippine, 20-22 June 2018(Right)

Table1: The activity carried-out by the PCU during November 2016 to June 2018

| Activity | Period | Objective | Results/outputs |
|--|------------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Organized the Regional Inception Workshop on Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> | 1-3 November 2016 | To organize the regional workshop to launch the project | Total 30 participants attended the workshop |
| 2. Developed the project website | October 2016 | To develop a prototype project website | Project website was completed with URL address: https://fisheries-refugia.org/ |
| 3. Developed the Short film and animations for the project | December 2016 | To produce an inception phase short film and animation for the project | A short film of the project was launched on the project website, Facebook fan page, and YouTube channel of the project. |
| 4. Attended to the 8 th Annual Large Marine Ecosystem and Coastal Partners Meeting, IOC/UNESCO Headquarters | 6-9 December 2016 | To strengthen the cooperation of the project. | Promotion of the Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Project to another LMEs |
| 5. Attended to the Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Management Committee Meeting, Coron, Philippines | 18-22 April 2017 | To attend the site-based committee meeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 6. Technical support for Cambodia | 30 January – 3 February 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 7. Technical support for Philippines | 5-8 February 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 8. Technical support for Vietnam | 13-16 February 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project initiating phase | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 9. Attended to the 6 th Meeting of the GoT Meeting | 28 February – 3 March 2017 | To strengthen the cooperation with alignment project implementing by other donors. | Introduction of the Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Project to the GoT project |
| 10. Technical support for Malaysia | 6-8 March 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 11. Technical support for Philippines | 18-28 February 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and stakeholder consultation meeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 12. Attended to the 49 th Meeting of SEAFDEC Council | 2-8 April 2017 | To strengthen the cooperation of the project. | Report the progress of Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> project to SEAFDEC Council |
| 13. Technical support for Cambodia | 4-6 May 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 14. Participation to the UN conference | 5-9 June 2017 | To strengthen the cooperation of the project. | Promotion of the Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Project to other agencies. |

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| | | | Discussion with UN Environment for future cooperation |
| 15. Technical support for Cambodia | 2-6 July 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 16. Organized the Capacity Building for Stakeholder Consultation Workshop | 1-3 August 2017 | To building a capacity of the national project staff on arrangement of stakeholder Consultation Workshop | 2 representatives from Cambodia, 3 from Thailand, and 3 from Philippine had trained |
| 17. Technical support for Thailand | 7 September 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 18. Attended to Sustainable Agro Business Forum 26-27 Sep | 26-27 September 2017 | To strengthen the cooperation for the project. | Observation and sharing of information on Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> |
| 19. Technical support for Cambodia | 14-17 October 2017 | To support the national lead agency for project work planning, budgeting, and reporting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 20. Attended to the Building International Partnership to Enhance Science Based Ecosystem Approaches and the 19 th Annual Large Marine and Coastal Partners Meeting | 27 November – 1 December 2017 | To strengthen the cooperation of the project. | Observation and sharing of information on Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> |
| 21. Attended to the inauguration ceremony of FR information center on Tanjung Leman, Malaysia | 19-20 November 2017 | To attend for inauguration ceremony of FR information center on Tanjung Leman | Observation on the achievement on establishment of the Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> institution at selected site |
| 22. Filming of footage at Kep province, Cambodia | 14- 20 December 2017 | To support the communication and social media of the project. | Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> film |
| 23. Consultation visit to NFRDI, Philippine | 20-22 June 2018 | To support the national lead agency on project reporting and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 24. Consultation visit to FiA, Cambodia | 18-20 July 2018 | To support the national lead agency on project reporting and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 25. Consultation visit to DoF, Malaysia | 18-20 July 2018 | To support the national lead agency on project reporting and budgeting | Observation and Technical support to national activities |
| 26. Attended to the Experts Consultation Workshop on Guidance to Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender Equality and Social Well-being | 8-10 August 2018 | To strengthen the cooperation with alignment project implementing by other donors. | The list of indicators for gender mainstreaming to support the implementation of the project |
| 27. Attended to the 2 nd Sub-Regional Technical Meeting on Effective Fisheries Management between Cambodia and Thailand | 29-30 August 2018 | To strengthen the cooperation with alignment project implementing by other donors. | Support workplan for management of transboundary species between Thailand and Cambodia. |

