



The 6th 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 the Gulf of Thailand

4-6 July 2022

SEAFDEC/Training Department, Samutprakarn, Thailand

PROVISIONAL PROSPECTUS

I. INTRODUCTION

The South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand is a global center of shallow-water marine biological diversity that supports significant fisheries that are important to the food security and export income of Southeast Asian countries. These fisheries are characterized by high levels of fishing effort from the small-scale sector. Accordingly, all inshore waters of those areas are subject to intense fishing pressure. This situation of high small-scale fishing pressure and declining fisheries resources has contributed to unsustainable fishing methods to maintain catch and increase incomes in the short term. These include the use of destructive fishing gear and practices, such as the operation of demersal trawls and push nets in seagrass areas and the detonation of explosives and release of fish poisons in coral reef areas. Therefore, small-scale inshore fishing pressure has been identified as a significant cause of the degradation and loss of coastal habitats in the South China Sea.

Although action aimed at reducing the rate of loss of coastal habitats has been implemented by countries bordering the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand, the decadal rate of loss of such habitats remains high due to many reasons from not only fishing activities but including other human activities and climate changes. This continued decline in the total area of habitats critical to the life cycles of most aquatic species, combined with the high levels of coastal community dependence on fish, has raised serious concerns for the long-term sustainability of small-scale fisheries in the region. With fish production 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. This project entitled “Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand” was developed to meet this need via the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Program for South China Sea. Executed regionally by the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) in partnership with the government agencies responsible for fisheries in the six participating countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, the project is comprised of the following four project components:

Component 1 will result in the establishment of operational management at 15 priority fisheries refugia, with community-based refugia management plans being key outputs.

Component 2 focuses on strengthening the enabling environment for the formal designation and operational management of refugia.

Component 3 focuses on strengthening information management and dissemination aimed at enhancing the national uptake of best practices in integrating fisheries management and biodiversity conservation, and in improving community acceptance of area-based approaches to fisheries and coastal environmental management; and

Component 4 will strengthen cross-sectorial coordination for integrated fisheries and environmental management and harness the national scientific and technical expertise and knowledge

required to inform the policy, legal and institutional reforms for fisheries refugia management in the participating countries.

To kick off the implementation of the Project, the Inception Workshop was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, on 1–3 November 2016 with the aim to introduce the overall project goals, objectives, overview of the Project Management Framework, including monitoring and evaluation, sharing of regional and national initiatives related to fisheries *refugia* project, Letter of Agreement (LOA), work plan and finance matters, and other business. The project initiation by country is referred agreement with SEAFDEC. Four countries, namely Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, signed the agreement in 2017; later, Viet Nam and Indonesia signed it in mid of 2019.

To facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the project, the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) was established with the responsibility for overseeing the scientific and technical elements of the project; ensuring effective implementation of activities undertaken during project execution; and providing sound scientific and technical advice to the Project Steering Committee. In this connection, the 1st Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting (**RSTC1**) was held in Trat Province, Thailand, from 11 to 13 September 2018, and the 2nd Meeting (**RSTC2**) was held in Kampot, Cambodia, during 21-23 May 2019, the 3rd Meeting (**RSTC3**) held in Hai Phong, Viet Nam during 5-7 February 2020, and the 4th Meeting (**RSTC4 Ad-hoc**) held as an ad-hoc virtual meeting on 22 July 2021. The results from the previous four meetings were focused on the following issues: TOR for the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee; progress of national and regional activities in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020; baseline survey template; gender mainstreaming; project budgeting, reporting, and evaluation; GIS mapping and ocean modeling system; management of transboundary species such as short mackerel and frigate tuna; development of the regional website; awareness building program; management for transboundary species, regional plan of action for Indo-Pacific Mackerel; indicators for the management of fisheries refugia; preparation for Mid-term Review; preparation for regional training on larval fish identification; issues and challenges; and others relevant matter. The complete reports of RSTC1, RSTC2, RSTC3, and RSTC4 Ad-hoc were uploaded to the following URL for downloading: https://1drv.ms/u/s!AntX_2ae6_25g_lshX2TXLug9MMdBg?e=y1SnQN

At the Fifth Meeting (RSTC5), held on 16-17 March 2022, a virtual meeting discussed some technical aspects from the results of the Mid-term Review, drafted regional guidelines on indicators for sustainable management of fisheries refugia, the progress works, and financial matter as of 31 December 2021. The PCU uploaded the RSTC5 report to the following URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1773>

To follow up on the progress works, particularly on the results framework from each participating country and regional programs, SEAFDEC/PCU proposes organizing the 6th Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting (RSTC6) scheduled for the 1st week of July 2022. Accordingly, the meeting will be held face-to-face and hosted by Thailand as agreed in principle at the RSTC5.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RSTC6 MEETING

- Updating the national and regional activities.
- Considering the Results Framework, particularly on the results of target outputs, outcomes of the following objectives:
 - Effective management of key threats to 14 fisheries refugia sites [269,500 ha], including ~50 percent reduction in fishing pressure within sites at times critical to the life cycles of fished species of transboundary significance
 - National and regional policy, legal and planning frameworks for demarcating boundaries and managing fisheries refugia, resulting in, inter alia, a 20 percent increase in small-scale fishing vessels using fishing gear and practices designed to safeguard fish stock and critical habitat linkages at priority sites
 - National and regional systems for knowledge management and sharing, including the development of indicator sets and standardized statistics to guide the replication, scaling-up and mainstreaming of good practices in the use of fisheries refugia as a spatial planning tool, and

- Effective multilateral and intergovernmental communication and joint decision-making, including using a consensual knowledge base in planning ecologically and cost-effective management actions.
- Development of fisheries resources database.
- Preparation for the Regional Training Workshop on Larval Fish Identification and Early Life History Study
- Other matters

III. MEETING DATE AND VENUE

The RSTC6 will be held on 4-6 July 2022, SEAFDEC/TD, Samutprakarn, Thailand.

IV. PARTICIPANTS

- A Regional Scientific and Technical Committee from 6 implementing countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam (refers to as the TORs for RSTC)
- Representative(s) from SEAFDEC Technical Department(s) and Secretariat,
- Regional and National fishery expert(s) from research institutions and academics who are involved in the project implementation,
- PCU staff, senior officer(s) from SEAFDEC.