



**The 8th Meeting of the Project Steering Committee 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**

23 December 2022
(08:30 – 11:30AM, UTC+7)
Virtual Meeting via Zoom Platform

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 the implementation of 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. Small-scale inshore fishing pressure has therefore 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 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. This project entitled “Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” (Fisheries *Refugia* in short) has been developed to meet this need via implementation of the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Program for the South China Sea. Executed regionally by the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) in partnership with the government agencies responsible for fisheries in the 6 participating countries namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam, the project is comprised of the following 4 project components:

Component 1 will result in the establishment of operational management at 14 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 will 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 implementation of the Project, the Inception Workshop was conducted in Bangkok, Thailand, on 1 – 3 November 2016 with the aims to introduce the overall project goals, objectives, overview of the Project Framework including monitoring and evaluation, sharing of regional and national initiatives related to fisheries *refugia* project, required Letter of Agreement (LOA), work plan and finance matters, and other business. The project implementation at country level is, therefore, based on the status of LOA submission to the Project Coordinating Unit (PCU), and presently all 6 relevant countries namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam have signed the LOA and started the project implementation since 2017, excepted for Indonesia and Viet Nam in the 3rd Quarter of 2019.

To facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Fisheries *Refugia* project, the national and regional institutions have been established to facilitate the implementation of the Fisheries *Refugia*. At regional management frameworks two institutions: Regional Project Steering Committee (PSC); and Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) shall play an important role to ensuring effective implementation of activities undertaken during project execution; and providing sound scientific and technical advice for further policy decision made by the PSC.

The first Meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC1) was organized at Jasmine City Hotel, Bangkok, Thailand on 4 - 5 December 2018. The PCS1 discussed and adopted the terms of reference and rule of procedure for the PSC, and agreed the national results framework including proposed revision of workplan/timetable due to relay of implementation. The progress of works made by partners and countries as well as the country commitments to active implementation the project is also recorded. The PSC1 report is published and uploaded to the following Refugia website link: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/874>

The Second Project Steering Committee Meeting (PSC2) was organized at Pullman Hotels and Resorts, Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia on 5 – 6 November 2019. The PSC2 discussed and endorsed the following regional programs: List of Indicators for Management of Fisheries Refugia, Regional Action Plan for Sustainable Management of Transboundary species: *Rastrelliger bachysoma*, project decisions on ocean modelling, knowledge attitude and practices, and the financial and budget matters. The PSC2 also noted the progress of the GCF Project on improving healthy ocean ecosystems through best practices in trawl fisheries, the results of the 24th IGM of COBSEA, and other matter. The PSC2 report is published and uploaded to the following Refugia website link: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1474>

The Third and Forth Project Steering Committee (Ad-hoc) Meetings were organized virtually via Zoom platform on 16 June and 6 October 2021, respectively. The results from two ad-hoc PCS3 and PSC4 meetings are the endorsement by the Committee on proposed project extension for two years from 2021 to 2022, a 10% reduction of the unspent budget as of 31 December 2019, and the proposed Budget Revision and costed Workplan for 2021 and 2022. The meetings also updated the Covid-19 impact to the project implementation by participating countries. The reports of PSC3 (ad-hoc) and PSC4 (ad-hoc) are published and uploaded to the following Refugia website link: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1563> and <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1578>

The Fifth Meeting was organized virtually via Zoom platform on 3 September 2021 with the aims to continue updating the progress of works and review the issues raised for consideration and approval by the PSC. The meeting highlighted the project achievements as of 30 June 2021, particularly

a total of five proposed refugia boundaries to be adopted by three countries, namely Cambodia (1), Malaysia (2) and Thailand (2). Another achievement is the endorsement of the Transboundary cooperation in managing of Indo-pacific mackerel in the Gulf of Thailand Sub-region by ASEAN. Furthermore, the meeting was updated on the progress works for the Mid-term Review, signing between SEAFDEC and six participating countries on the project extension LoA/MoU, and financial and budgetary matters. The PSC5 full report is published and uploaded to the SEAFDEC repository system as: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1730>

The Sixth Ad-hoc Meeting was organized virtually via Zoom platform on 30 November 2021. The main results are adoption of the 3rd Budget Revision as of 30 September 2021 and the proposed costed work plan for 2022. The Meeting also finalized the firms for auditing of the financial statement for 2021 which will be completed by the end of March 2022. The meeting also updated and encouraged to participating countries on involvement of GEF Small Grants Program which aims to strengthening the civil society and community organization involving in fisheries refugia management through their operational partnership. The PSC6 (Ad-hoc) full report is published and uploaded to the SEAFDEC repository system as: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1746>

The Seventh Ad-hoc Meeting was organized virtually via Zoom platform on 27 May 2022. The meeting updated the results on establishing 15 fisheries refugia from six countries and adopted the regional guidelines on indicators for sustainable management of fisheries refugia. The meeting discussed, commented, and endorsed the results from Mid Term Reviews report for further submission to UNEP. For financial matter, the PCU proposed the adjustment of actual expenditures in 2018, 2019, and 2020 in accordance with the financial audit reports. The 4th Budget Revision was raised due to some country requested for extra-budget. The meeting agreed that this budget revision will be considered at the forthcoming RSTC6 Meeting in July 2022 due to urgent matter to support project implementation. The PSC7 (Ad-hoc) full report is published and uploaded to the SEAFDEC repository system as: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1797>

SEAFDEC/PCU proposed the Eighth Meeting of the Project Steering Committee (PSC8) as a project closing meeting to finalize all the project achievements by each country partners and Regional program. The PSC8 will be discussed on the procedure and timeline for closure of project, collaboration with the SCS SAP Implementation project, project financial matters, proposed amendment of the Annex 9 of MTR report and other matters.

II. MEETING VENUE

The meeting will be held via Zoom platform on 23 December 2022 from 08:30 to 11:30AM (UTC+7). To access the zoom meeting, the URL Link will be provided to all participants 7 days before the meeting.

III. PARTICIPANTS TO THE PSC8

- Refers to the adopted TOR for Project Steering Committee, Full members of the Project Steering Committee (PSC) shall consist solely of representatives of all participating countries in the project. Each country shall designate two members: one member shall be the Chairperson of the policy-level, National Fisheries Refugia Committee (NFRC) or National Focal Point (NFP); the other shall be the Chairperson of the National Scientific and Technical Committee (NSTC).
- SEAFDEC/Secretary-General or representative and responsible officers from TD
- A Project Task Manager and/or a representative of the UN Environment Programme
- Representative(s) from the SCS/SAP Implementation Project
- Project Director of the PCU, as a secretariat of the meeting and concerned officers