



**The 2nd 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**

5th – 6th November 2019

Pullman Miri Waterfront Hotel, Miri, Sarawak, Malaysia

KEYNOTE STATEMENT

By Ms. Malinee Smithrithee
SEAFDEC Secretary-General,

- Dato' Dr. Bah Piyan Tan, Deputy Director-General of the Department of Fisheries Malaysia and concurrently the National Focal Point for Malaysia on the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Fisheries Refugia Project;
- All Project Steering Committee from 6 participating countries;
- UNEP Project Task Manager: Madame Isabelle Vanderbeck
- My colleagues from SEAFDEC and the PCU;
- Observers;
- Ladies and Gentlemen
- Good morning,.

It is my privilege and pleasure to be here to give a Keynote address on behalf of the SEAFDEC executing agency and the Project Coordinating Unit at this 2st Meeting of the Project Steering Committee under 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.

As you are already aware of, the coastal waters of Southeast Asia were blessed with highly productive fisheries resources because of the rich ecosystems such as dense mangrove forests and vast sea grass beds sustained by rich effluents of nutrients from land, as well as extensive coral reefs with clean tropical sea environment. These areas are critical to a broad range of aquatic organisms during their life cycle from breeding, spawning, nursing and growing. These areas also host the feeding zones of aquatic species that are economically important and serve as important sources of recruitment of a wide diversity of fisheries resources.

However, we are also aware that most of the commercially important fisheries resources in the region have declined due to many factors that include overfishing, illegal fishing, rampant use of destructive fishing practices, and environmental degradation. In the such conditions, the breeding, nursery and feeding areas of many aquatic species such as fishes, crustaceans, and mollusks could also be destroyed and finally lost. Taking into accounts above concerns, the concept of fisheries *refugia* was developed, as a novel approach to integrate fisheries and habitat management in the context of high and increasing levels of small-scale fishing pressure in the Southeast Asia.

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, SEAFDEC has been the technical arm to support the ASEAN Member States for more than 5 decades to ensure the sustainability of fisheries and aquaculture in Southeast Asia. Recently, we are also the UNEP partnership to support the Strategic Action Program

for the SCS through the implementation of fisheries refugia. We assure you that we will continue our efforts to create more activities and programs under the UNEP/GEF Funding.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Department of Fisheries, Malaysia for hosting and excellent preparation to the meeting. I also wish we will have fruitful discussions and fruitful results and achievements of this 2nd Project Steering Committee Meeting.

Thank you very much.