



The 5th Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting
For the SEAFDEC/UN Environment/GEF Project on Establishment and Operation of
a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand

16-17 March 2022
(08:30 – 12:00 am, UTC+7)
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 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 is 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 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 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 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 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 on the LOA submission to the Project Coordinating Unit (PCU). 4 countries, namely Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand, signed the LOA in 2017, while Viet Nam and Indonesia signed 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 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, the 2nd Meeting (**RSTC2**) 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

To follow up the progress works implemented at national and regional programs in the past years till 2021, and further, discuss several issues related to the Mid-term Review results, guidelines for fisheries refugia indicators, financial matter for national and regional activities in 2022, SEAFDEC/PCU proposes the 5th Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting (**RSTC5**) which is scheduled on 16-17 March 2022. Due to the covid-19 pandemic limit on traveling, the SEAFDEC/PCU proposes an online meeting via the Zoom platform.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RSTC5 MEETING

- Updating the country and regional activities
- Considering the Results of Mid-Term Review
- Considering the proposal for utilization of the Unspent, including a suggestion from the UNEP Task Manager (TM) and SEAFDEC
- Considering and finalizing the Draft Guideline for Fisheries Refugia Indicators
- Discussing on the review the marine and coastal planning of each country
- Preparation for the Regional Training Workshop on Larval Fish Identification and Early Life History Science
- Issues, challenges, and strategic plan towards achieving the project target goals by 2022; and
- Other matters

III. MEETING DATE AND PLATFORM

The RSTC5 will be held on 16-17 March 2022 from 08:30 to 12:00 am UTC+7. The RTSC5 is a virtual meeting via the ZOOM platform.

All Committees and other invited participants can access the Zoom Meeting via the link sent to all participants two weeks before the meeting starts.

IV. PARTICIPANTS

- Regional Scientific and Technical Committees from 6 implementing countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam,
- Invited fisheries refugia national focal points from 6 countries,
- Representative(s) from SEAFDEC and UNEP,
- Experts/consultants from various institutions in the country who are involved in the project implementation,
- Representative(s) from the project partners such as the SCS SAP, and others, and
- PCU staff, senior officer(s) from SEAFDEC.