



**The 7th Meeting of Regional Scientific and Technical Committee
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**

8-10 November 2022
Grand Mercure Harmoni-Jakarta, Indonesia

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 high small-scale fishing pressure and declining fisheries resources have contributed to unsustainable fishing methods to maintain catch and increase incomes in the short term. These include using destructive fishing gear and practices, such as operating demersal trawls and push nets in seagrass areas, detonating explosives, and releasing fish poisons in coral reef areas. Therefore, small-scale inshore fishing pressure has been identified as a significant cause of the South China Sea's degradation and loss of coastal habitats.

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 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 establish 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 refugia's formal designation and operational management.

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 to introduce the overall project goals, objectives, and 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, 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, a series of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) has been organized since 2018 till the present as follows:

- First Meeting (**RSTC1**) was held in Trat Province, Thailand, from 11 to 13 September 2018.
- The second Meeting (**RSTC2**) was held in Kampot, Cambodia, during 21-23 May 2019.
- The third Meeting (**RSTC3**) was held in Hai Phong, Viet Nam, during 5-7 February 2020.
- Forth Meeting (**RSTC4**), a virtual meeting, was held on 22 July 2021.
- Fifth Meeting (**RSTC5**), a virtual meeting, was held on 16-17 March 2022.
- The sixth Meeting (**RSTC6**) was held at SEAFDEC Training Department, Samutprakarn, Thailand, on 4-6 July 2022.

The results from the past 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 reports of RSTC1, RSTC2, RSTC3, and RSTC4 Ad-hoc were linked to: https://1drv.ms/u/s!AntX_2ae6_25g_lshX2TXLug9MMdBg?e=y1SnQN.

The Fifth Meeting (RSTC5) discussed some specific 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 matters as of 31 December 2021. The RSTC5 report was uploaded to the URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1773>.

In addition, the Sixth Meeting (RSTC6), a face-to-face meeting, was held on 4-6 July 2022 at SEAFDEC Training Department, Samutprakarn, Thailand. Achievements at national and regional levels were discussed to assure that the results/outputs and outcomes as of 31 June 2022 align with the results framework approved by the GEF/CEO. The PCU also informed the meeting of the closure of the project activities and the memorandum of agreement for advance consideration by all six partner countries. RSTC6 report was uploaded to: <http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12067/1810>.

Considering that the project end by December 2022, PCU plans to organize the Seventh meeting of the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC7) to finalize all achievements/outputs at national and regional levels, including reviewing lessons learned and what partners should keep doing at the end of the project. Referring to the RSTC6 results, the Bureau of Public Relations and Foreign Cooperation, Secretariat General of the Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries (MMAF), offered to host the RSTC7 meeting. Accordingly, the RSTC7 is tentatively scheduled for the second week of November 2022 in Jakarta, Indonesia.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE RSTC7 MEETING

Referring to the RSTC6 Results held in July 2022, the committee supported the proposed proposal for organizing the RSTC7 Meeting in the fourth quarter of 2022. This is the last event for RSTC to meet before the project end on 31 December 2022. The objectives are, therefore, as follows:

- Updating the work progress, including achievements, issues, and challenges as of 30 October 2022, at the national and regional levels.
- Presenting and reviewing the GEF/IW Learn Experience Notes by six participating countries.
- Final Country Report Template
- The way forward before and after the project ended
- Financial and Co-financing
- Other matters

III. MEETING DATE AND VENUE

The RSTC7 will be held on 8-10 November 2022 at Grand Mercure Harmoni-Jakarta, Indonesia.

IV. PARTICIPANTS

- A National Scientific and Technical Focal Point from 6 implementing countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam.
- Invited National Focal Point and Fishery Expert(s) from research institutions and academics involved in the project implementation.
- Representative(s) from SEAFDEC Technical Departments: TD and MFRDMD
- Local supporting officers from MMAF, Indonesia
- Project Coordination Unit staff and SEAFDEC/TD administrative staff.