

## **Final Report**

# **Mid-Term Review UNEP/GEF 'Establishing and Operation of a Regional system of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand'**

**GEF ID 5401**

Peter Whalley

February 2022

## Project Identification Table

Table 1 - Project summary

<b>GEF Project ID:</b>	5401		
<b>Implementing Agency:</b>	UNEP	<b>Executing Agency:</b>	SEAFDEC
<b>Relevant SDG(s) and indicator(s):</b>	<p><i>SDG Target 14: Indicator 14.2, 14.4 and 14.a</i>  <i>SDG Target 1: Indicator 1b</i>  <i>SDG Target 2: Indicator 2.4</i>  <i>SDG Target 12: Indicator 12.2</i></p>		
<b>GEF Core Indicator Targets (identify these for projects approved prior to GEF-7)</b>	<p>Indicator 2.2 Marine protected areas under improved management effectiveness (target 269,500 ha; actual 382,400 ha)  Indicator 7.1 Level of Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme (TDA/SAP) formulation and implementation (target '4')  Indicator 7.2 Level of Regional Legal Agreements and Regional Management Institutions to support its implementation (Target '3')  Indicator 7.3 Level of National/Local reforms and active participation of Inter-Ministerial Committees (Target '4')  Indicator 7.4 Level of engagement in IWLEARN through participation and delivery of key products (Target '4')</p>		
<b>Sub-programme:</b>	SP3 – EA321	<b>Expected Accomplishment(s):</b>	EA (a) The health and productivity of marine, freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems are institutionalized in education, monitoring and cross-sector and transboundary collaboration frameworks at the national and international levels
<b>UNEP approval date:</b>		<b>Programme of Work Output(s):</b>	Healthy and productive ecosystems
<b>GEF approval date:</b>	January 2016	<b>Project type:</b>	Full-Size Project
<b>GEF Operational Programme #:</b>	GEF-5	<b>Focal Area(s):</b>	International Waters Strategic
		<b>GEF Strategic Priority:</b>	Priority 2: Catalyze multi-state cooperation to rebuild marine fisheries
<b>Expected start date:</b>	December 2016	<b>Actual start date:</b>	March 2016
<b>Planned completion date:</b>	December 2020	<b>Actual operational completion date:</b>	December 2020 (Original) December 2022 (revised)
<b>Planned project budget at approval:</b>	12,717,850	<b>Actual total expenditures reported as of 30 June 2021:</b>	PIR 1,696,032

<b>GEF grant allocation:</b>	3,000,000	<b>GEF grant expenditures reported as of September 2021:</b>	1,749,526
<b>Expected co-financing:</b>	12,717,850	<b>Secured co-financing (December 2021):</b>	19,841,526
<b>Date of first disbursement:</b>	Aug 2016	<b>Planned date of financial closure:</b>	TBD
<b>No. of formal project revisions:</b>	3	<b>Date of last approved project revision:</b>	December 2021
<b>No. of Steering Committee meetings:</b>	6	<b>Date of last/next Steering Committee meeting:</b>	November 2021   TBD
<b>Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (planned date):</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter 2020 – 1 <sup>st</sup> Quarter 2021	<b>Mid-term Review/ Evaluation (actual date):</b>	November 2021 – February 2022
<b>Terminal Evaluation (planned date):</b>	TBD	<b>Terminal Evaluation (actual date):</b>	TBD
<b>Coverage - Country(ies):</b>	Cambodia Indonesia Malaysia Philippines Thailand Viet Nam	<b>Coverage - Region(s):</b>	Asia - Pacific
<b>Dates of previous project phases:</b>	N/A	<b>Status of future project phases:</b>	TBD

## Acknowledgements

This Mid-Term Review has been prepared by an independent consultant, Dr Peter Whalley and the views expressed are his own. The consultant is grateful for the comprehensive responses to many the questions by the Project Manager Dr Somboon Siriraksophon. The consultant is also grateful for the time taken by stakeholders to respond to questions and assist through remote interviews.

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## Abbreviations

ASEAN	The Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEO	Chief Executive Officer [GEF]
COBSEA	Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia
COVID	Coronavirus
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EA	Executing Agency [SEAFDEC]
FMO	[UNEP] Fund Management Officer
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographical Information System
IA	Implementing Agency
ICM	Integrated Coastal Management
IOC/WESTPAC	Inter-governmental Oceanography Commission for the Western Pacific
IUU	Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated [fishing methods]
IW	[GEF] International Waters
IW:LEARN	International Waters Learning Exchange & Resources Network
LME	Large Marine Ecosystem
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTR	Mid-Term Review
NFRC	National Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Committees
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PCU	Project Co-ordination Unit
PIR	Project Implementation Review [annual report]
PMC	Project Management Cost
PSC	Project Steering Committee
RSTC	Regional Scientific and Technical Committee
RWG-F	Regional Working Group on Fisheries
SAP	Strategic Action Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEAFDEC	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound
TDA	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
TM	[UNEP] Task Manager
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
USD	United States Dollar

## Executive Summary

A Mid-Term Review of the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Project: '*Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand*', has been undertaken, consistent with the requirements of the GEF and UNEP.

This report presents the background to the project, the findings from the Mid-Term Review together with conclusions, lessons and recommendations identified from the work of the project. The project started in December 2016 and was originally planned to end in December 2020. A two-year no cost extension was requested and approved by the Project Steering Committee. The current end-date is December 2022. This Mid-Term Review was conducted between November 2021 and February 2022.

The review is designed to inform stakeholders, including the GEF Agency and Executing Agency on the levels of achievement of the project towards the delivery of the planned outputs and outcomes and provide suggestions to the Project on key activities that would assist enable the achievement of the overall planned objective.

The project was designed to pilot aspects of the fishery management actions identified in the regionally endorsed South China Sea Strategic Action Programme (2008) through the testing of a *fisheries refugia* concept to manage coastal environments and key fish stocks. The pilots, undertaken in six countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) were supported through regional capacity building and awareness programmes at the regional level.

### Findings

The **Project has been assessed overall by this Mid-Term Review** as being **Moderately Satisfactory**. The Mid-Term Review acknowledges the **achievements** to-date of the project but considers that there is still a significant programme of work required to complete the project within the next year and rates the output delivery as **Moderately Satisfactory**. The project builds directly on the success of the Strategic Action Programme and is highly relevant to the countries of the region and the strategies of UNEP and the **Relevance** is considered to be **Highly Satisfactory**. The project has been **effective** in establishing 12 *refugia* sites and undertaking multiple workshops, capacity development and awareness raising activities, and has been rated as **Satisfactory**. The **efficiency** of project execution is rated as **Moderately Satisfactory** due to the delays associated with the change of project managers, the slow contracting of some countries to implement pilots and the inevitable delays resulting from COVID, resulting in a two-year no-cost extension. The overall **sustainability** of the project's activities is considered to be **Likely** through the support of an active regional fisheries organisation and strong support from the countries demonstrated by the endorsed Strategic Action Programme.

### Conclusions

The fisheries *refugia* project is derived from actions in the regionally endorsed South China Sea Strategic Action Programme that identified the high pressure of fishing on the fish stock and related coastal ecosystems that was resulting in declining ecosystem services and affecting the socio-economic conditions of dependent communities. The Strategic Action Programme recommended the establishment of fisheries *refugia* to address these problems by drawing on fisheries management concepts that are easily understood at the fishing community level, emphasising sustainable use rather than prohibition.

The development of the Project Document involved extensive engagement with coastal communities and national fisheries stakeholders that has assisted the regional acceptance of the concept of fisheries *refugia*.

The original Project Manager resigned shortly after the project's inception phase and there was a significant delay before appointing a replacement which led to a slow initiation of the project. The project also struggled to get final signed agreements with Indonesia and Viet Nam that has delayed further their progress in the project. As with all projects at present, the fisheries *refugia* project has had to work under varying COVID restrictions since early 2019, and has responded with appropriate adaptive management actions to ensure that meetings and other activities could be undertaken remotely where possible. However, these restrictions have clearly had a significant impact on progress. A two-year no-cost extension was identified by the Project Steering Committee in 2020 as a necessity and this was granted by UNEP with a revised end-date of December 2022.

The project has successfully launched pilots at 12 sites, with three more planned in Viet Nam to test community-based actions relating to fisheries *refugia*, complemented by significant capacity development and awareness raising actions, with ten management plans either developed or likely to be approved by 2022.

There have been significant changes (ca. 50% variation from the approved figures) to component 1 and 4 budgets that clearly represent changes of ambition to the expected component activities. These changes should be clearly explained and justified prior to the terminal evaluation.

Stakeholders interviewed have indicated their support for the project and shown their commitment to the concept of fisheries *refugia* which provides confidence to the Mid-Term Review in the sustainability of the project's actions that is reinforced with the previous national endorsement of the Strategic Action Programme with which this project is aligned. The project has been successful at conveying the concept of fisheries *refugia* to coastal communities that have seen this approach as a viable alternative to 'no-catch' approaches such as Marine Protected Areas.

The Mid-Term Review considers that the current level of project output deliver (60%) and grant expenditure (58%) appears low given the remaining approved project extension. The Mid-Term Review considers that a further extension, working in close co-operation with the GEF/UNEP South China Sea Strategic Action Programme implementation project, should be considered.

## **Lessons Learned**

**Lesson 1 Importance of full involvement of stakeholders in the design, execution and management of project activities:** The fisheries *refugia* project has adopted a very proactive approach to engaging stakeholders in the initial and subsequent implementation through the formation of National Science and Technical, and Management Committees. This has resulted in a high level of acceptance of the fisheries *refugia* approach. GEF IW projects involving pilot actions with communities should be encouraged to more actively engage local stakeholders, at the earliest opportunities, to gain acceptance for actions in a range of local and ministerial level stakeholders of novel concepts.

**Lesson 2 Importance of Project Inception Reports and updating Project Results Framework:** The fisheries *refugia* project had a detailed inception phase resulting in a wealth of documents and other information that was presented at the inception meeting. Unfortunately, this information did not result in a formal project Inception Report presenting any changes to the project design, including the Results Framework. The Implementing Agency should ensure that all projects deliver an agreed

Inception Report that includes any changes to the Results Framework for approval by the Project Steering Committee and/or Inception Meeting.

**Lesson 3 Ensuring partners/countries fully understand the contractual arrangements planned for the implementation of the project:** The project did ensure that there was a wide understanding of the technical aspects of the project that had been formulated in the Strategic Action Programme. However, it is clear that the modality of project execution was not fully understood, resulting in significant delays in initiating project activities in some countries. GEF International Waters projects involving pilot or country specific activities should also have the proposed arrangements for implementation fully explained.

### **Recommendations**

**Recommendation 1 To: Project Co-ordination Unit/Executing Agency:** Should seek an additional project extension to complete the remaining work and utilise the budget to deliver expected activities, especially for the countries that have achieved 50% or less of expected outputs. The Mid-Term Review considers that a further one-year extension would enable the project to focus on the countries that have achieved less progress to ensure all countries and relevant coastal communities get the maximum benefits from pilot actions to test fisheries *refugia* approaches. The Project Co-ordination Unit should explore what resources could be available from the South China Sea Strategic Action Programme implementation project to enable the finalisation of the fisheries *refugia* project.

**Recommendation 2 To: Project Co-ordination Unit/Executing Agency:** Irrespective of Recommendation 1 being accepted, the Project Co-ordination Unit should revise workplan and Results Framework to ensure that these reflect the current situation and budgets to deliver all remaining expected activities and outputs to be achieved. There is an opportunity at the Mid-Term Review to present realistic deliverables that reflect the 10% reduction of unspent budgets that might have an impact on what can be achieved by the pilots at the national/local level. The Project Co-ordination Unit should also prepare a clear statement of the significant project component changes (from the Endorsed CEO Document) with justifications and an assessment of the impacts on the intended ambition of the project.

**Recommendation 3 To: Project Co-ordination Unit: Collate and analyse disaggregated sex data of participants involved in project activities.** the project has collected sex disaggregate information from workshops and meetings which is commendable. It would be beneficial to present this information in the next Project Implementation Review report and have the data analysed prior to the Terminal Evaluation.

**Recommendation 4 To: Project Co-ordination Unit Develop a clear Exit Strategy for the regional and national sustainability and replication of the activities.** The project has collected a wealth of experiences and information from the pilot sites and regional activities, much of which is presented on the website(s) and at various IW:LEARN and other organisations' events. The Mid-Term Review recommends that the project managers of this project and South China Sea Strategic Action Programme implementation project brainstorm shared approaches to address their project needs. The South China Sea project requires an update of the fishery aspects of the 2008 Strategic Action Programme and the fisheries *refugia* project needs to complete the project (e.g. Indonesia and Viet Nam) to the level of detail expected in the GEF CEO Endorsement Document.

**Recommendation 5 To: Project Co-ordination Unit: Preparation of GEF IW:LEARN Experience Notes.** GEF International Waters recommends the preparation of Experience Notes by projects based on

practical lessons from the execution. This project has a number of key aspects that would merit sharing through this mechanism including stakeholder involvement in pilot locations (design, implementation and management), lessons from gaining acceptance to the fisheries *refugia* concept, coastal ecosystem management, etc.

**Recommendation 6 To: UNEP and Executing Agency:** Ensure regional and national staff (and any replacement staff) engaged in financial management are briefed on the requirements of IA and EA at the start of the project. Stakeholders and the UNEP Fund Management Officer identified that staff and consultants were not sufficiently familiar with the requirements of financial reporting. The Fund Management Officer suggested that a training session is provided at project inception meetings to act as an induction course on the approaches for complying with UNEP financial reporting and the expectation of the GEF as the donor.

### Summary of Project Ratings

Criterion	Reviewer's Rating <sup>1</sup>
<b>Attainment of project objectives and results (overall rating)</b>	<b>MS</b>
<b>Sub criteria (below)</b>	
Achievement of outputs and activities	MS
Relevance	HS
Effectiveness	S
Efficiency	MS
<b>Sustainability of Project outcomes (overall rating)</b>	<b>L</b>
<b>Sub criteria (below)</b>	
Socio Political	L
Financial	L
Institutional framework	HL
Environmental	L
<b>Catalytic Role</b>	
Replication	S
Preparation and readiness	S
Country ownership	S
Stakeholders' participation and public awareness	S
Implementation approach and adaptive management	S
UNEP Supervision and backstopping	S
Financial planning and Management	MU - MS
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation (overall rating)</b>	<b>MS</b>
<b>Sub criteria (below)</b>	
M&E Design	MS
M&E Plan Implementation	MS
<b>Overall Rating</b>	<b>MS</b>

<sup>1</sup> Criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). **Sustainability** is rated from Highly Likely (HL) to Highly Unlikely (HU) on a four-point scale.

# 1 Evaluation Background

This Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Project: *'Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand'* (Fisheries Refugia project), is consistent with the requirements of the GEF and UNEP. The purpose of the MTR is to enable the members of the Project Steering Committee, the Project Co-ordination Unit (PCU), the Executing Agency (SEAFDEC), the Implementing Agency (UNEP), and regional and national partners to assess progress to-date, to identify any corrective actions needed, and to learn lessons for future projects.

## 1.1 Context

The South China Sea is a semi-enclosed sea, which supports a number of unique habitats and ecosystems that are amongst the most biologically diverse shallow water marine ecosystems globally. The countries surrounding the South China Sea have undergone very rapid economic development and rapid population increase in coastal areas over the past two decades resulting in degradation and loss of coastal habitats and resources. Recognising that actions were urgently needed to halt degradation of the environment of this marine basin, the countries of the region sought and received the assistance of UNEP and the GEF in preparing a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) of the issues, problems and their root causes as the basis for development of a Strategic Action Programme (SAP).

The SAP acknowledged the high pressure from fishing on the fish stock and related coastal ecosystems resulting in their services declining impacting socio-economic condition. The regional fisheries *refugia* initiative addresses the present problems by drawing on fisheries management concepts that are easily understood by fishing communities, emphasising sustainable use rather than prohibition. This focuses on building fishing community support for spatial planning approaches to coastal and marine resource management.

The Fisheries *Refugia* project has been designed to implement the SAP fisheries objectives in six participating countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam) with an aim to establish a system of fisheries *refugia* that focuses on the critical links between fish stocks and their habitats. To develop a mechanism to facilitate this, the Regional Working Group on Fisheries (RWG-F) has been and has been collaborating with the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) to implement the approach of fisheries *refugia* defined in the SAP as:

*'Spatially and geographically defined, marine or coastal areas in which specific management measures are applied to sustain important species during critical stages of their life cycle, for their sustainable use.'*

Fisheries *refugia* should:

- NOT be “no take zones”,
- Have the objective of sustainable use for the benefit of present and future generations,
- Provide for some areas within *refugia* to be permanently closed due to their critical importance [essential contribution] to the life cycle of a species or group of species,
- Focus on areas of critical importance in the life cycle of fished species, including spawning, and nursery grounds, or areas of habitat.

- Have different characteristics according to their purposes and the species or species groups for which they are established and within which different management measures will apply.

Have management plans. Management measures that may be applied within fisheries *refugia* may be drawn from the following list:

- Exclusion of a fishing method (e.g. light luring, purse seine fishing),
- Restricted gears (e.g. mesh size),
- Prohibited gears (e.g. push nets, demersal trawls),
- Vessel size/engine capacity,
- Seasonal closures during critical periods,
- Seasonal restrictions (e.g. use of specific gear that may trap larvae),
- Limited access and use of rights-based approaches in small-scale fisheries.

## 1.2 Relevance to the GEF Programme

The project responds to the GEF V International Waters Strategic Objectives 2 (*Catalyze multi-state cooperation to rebuild marine fisheries and reduce pollution of coasts and Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) while considering climatic variability and change*) with the expected focal area Outcome 2.1 (*Implementation of agreed Strategic Action Programmes (SAPs) incorporates ecosystem-based approaches to management of LMEs, ICM principles, and policy/legal/ institutional reforms into national/local plans*) Outcome 2.3 (*Innovative solutions implemented for reduced pollution, rebuilding or protecting fish stocks with rights-based management, ICM, habitat (blue forest) restoration/conservation, and port management and produce measurable results*).

## 1.3 The Project

The GEF Chief Executive Officer (CEO) endorsed the project in January 2016 and implementation began in March 2016. It was anticipated that the project would end in December 2020 but has been extended with a revised completion date of December 2022. The project is implemented by UNEP and executed by the SEAFDEC in partnership with agencies and other stakeholders responsible for fisheries in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The objective of the project is presented in the GEF CEO document as: *‘To operate and expand the network of fisheries refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand for the improved management of fisheries and critical marine habitats linkages in order to achieve the medium and longer-term goals of the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea’.*

The project has four components designed to meet this objective:

- **Component 1:** Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries *refugia* in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand;
- **Component 2:** Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledgebase for fisheries *refugia* management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand;
- **Component 3:** Information Management and Dissemination in support of national and regional-level implementation of the fisheries *refugia* concept in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand;

- **Component 4:** National and regional cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand;

Associated with these components (and their outcomes) are a wide range of specific outputs that will be assessed in terms of their delivery and contributions to the project outcomes and objective.

### 1.3.1 Project Budget

The project budget presented in the Consultant Terms of Reference (ToR) reflects the GEF CEO Endorsement Document figures.

<b>Project Component</b>	<b>Indicative Grant Amount (\$)</b>	<b>Indicative Co Financing (\$)</b>
1. Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries <i>refugia</i> in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	1,304,900	3,989,523
2. Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledgebase for fisheries <i>refugia</i> management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	746,000	5,313,217
3. Information Management and Dissemination in support of national and regional-level implementation of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> concept in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	299,600	1,792,055
4. National and regional cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	499,500	1,423,055
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>2,850,000</b>	<b>12,517,850</b>
<b>Project Management Cost (PMC)</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,000,000</b>	<b>12,717,850</b>

Table 2 – Budget per component (GEF CEO Endorsement Document)

### 1.3.2 Executing arrangements

The executing arrangements presented in the Project Document and the consultant's ToR is presented in Figure 1 (below).

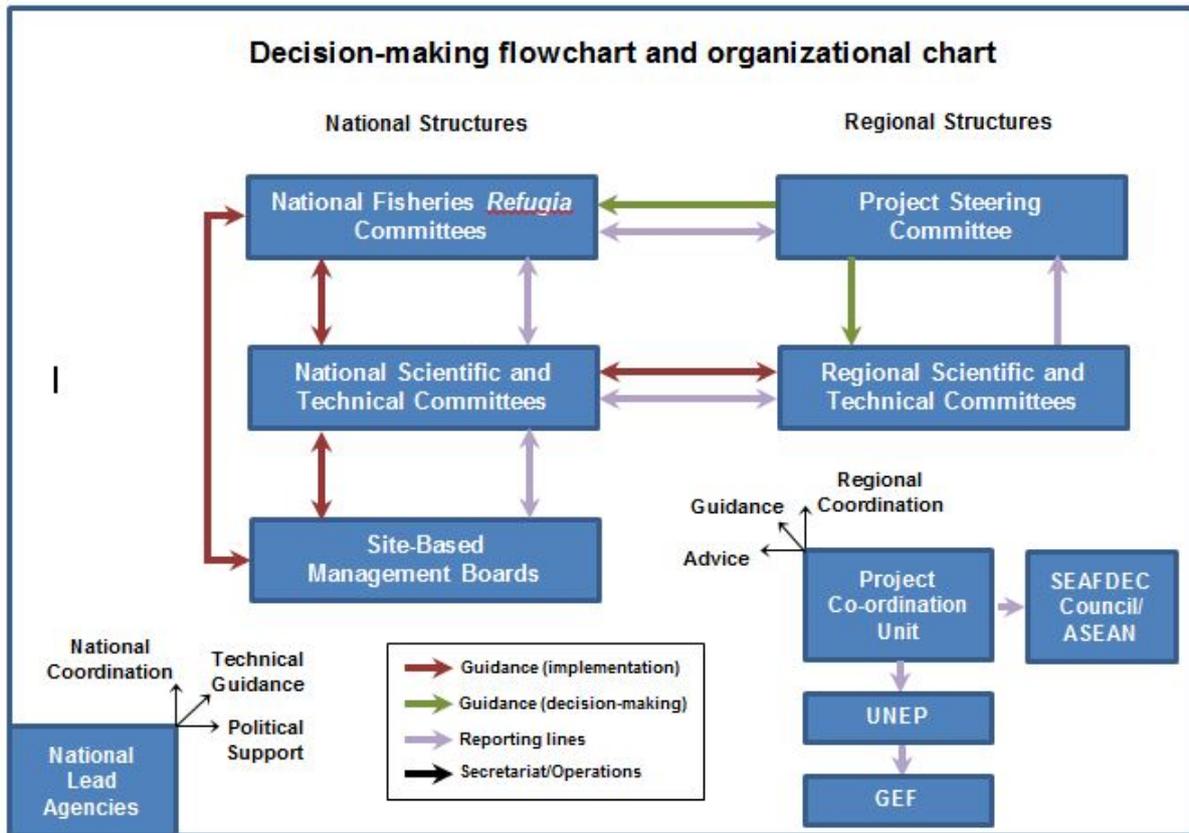


Figure 1 - Organisation and decision making arrangements (as presented in the Project Document and Consultant's ToR)

The project website describes the role of the governance structures as: 'To facilitate the achievement of the goals and objectives of the project entitled a Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) will be 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 (PSC)'.

The structures introduced at the regional level were mirrored by parallel advisory and supervisory bodies at the national level to manage the activities undertaken through the pilot actions. At the regional level, SEAFDEC has important links with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

#### 1.4 Evaluation objectives, scope and methodology

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for this Mid-Term Review laid out clear elements to be completed by the reviewer and noted that due to COVID 19 restrictions, all information collection and interviews with stakeholders were to be conducted remotely.

##### 1.4.1 Evaluation Objective and scope

The **objective of this MTR** is to assess the core criteria of *relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability* of the project's development and implementation and will seek views from a wide range of national and regional stakeholders. The **MTR's scope** will involve the project's GEF Implementing Agency (IA) and Executing Agency (EA) and addresses the design, implementation and management of the project. It will evaluate the efficiency of project management, including the delivery of outputs and activities in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-efficiency. The scope will also cover how crisis (COVID 19) have impacted the performance of the project. **The purpose of the MTR** is to

highlight the achievements of project results and identify any remedial actions that will be necessary to ensure that the project achieves its planned outcomes by completion.

#### **Box 1 Evaluation Criteria**

- **Relevance** – the extent to which the activity is suited to local and national development priorities and organisational policies, including changes over time, as well as the extent to which the project is in line with the GEF Operational Programmes or the strategic priorities under which the project was funded.
- **Effectiveness** – the extent to which an objective has been achieved or how likely it is to be achieved.
- **Efficiency** – the extent to which results have been delivered with the least costly resources possible.
- **Sustainability** – the likely ability of an intervention to continue to deliver benefits for an extended period of time after completion. Projects need to be environmentally as well as financially and socially sustainable.

#### 1.4.2 Methodology

##### **Information gathering**

The MTR information was gathered using:

- **Desk reviews** – including background documents (Project Documents, inception reports), progress reports (project website, PIRs, Project Steering Committee (PSC) minutes, technical project reports), etc. The Project Manager was provided with a list of required documents and these were uploaded to a shared folder.
- An **evaluation matrix** was developed in the MTR Inception Report to serve as a template for addressing the key criteria for this MTR as presented in the ToR (Annex 1). This matrix guided the desk review of available documents and the interviews with stakeholders.
- **Identification of stakeholders to participate in emailed questionnaire and remote interviews.** The Project Manager was guided by the consultant on stakeholder types to be contacted to give a range of stakeholders to be interviewed. A final list of approximately 25 stakeholders were approached to respond to a short questionnaire (Annex 4). These included Project Steering Committee members, Regional Scientific and Technical Committee members, representatives of National Fisheries bodies, consultants working on the project and civil society and private sector representatives UNEP, EA, the PCU and other relevant GEF projects in the region. Responses were received from 14 stakeholders (see Annex 2).
- **Analysis and review preparation:** A reconstructed Theory of Change (ToC) was presented in the Inception Report and assisted in assessing the progress towards the outcomes and longer-term impacts identified. The progress and achievements of the project's outputs have been reviewed based on interviews and documents received from the PCU including, review of Project Results Framework, delivery of outputs prepared by the PCU, financial reports, etc. A list of the documents and websites consulted are presented in Annex 3.

**Cross-cutting issues:** The evaluation also examined aspects of awareness raising, capacity development, civil society engagement (including gender issues) within the frame of the project's objective. These cross-cutting issues are included within the evaluation matrix agreed in the Inception Report and questions to stakeholders (Annex 4).

## 1.5 Limitations

A key **limitation** for this MTR, as a consequence of COVID 19 restrictions, has been that many stakeholders have not been at their normal workplace whilst the evaluation was being conducted and information was obtained remotely (through emails and/or remote interviews) that required adequate home internet connections.

An additional limitation impacting the level of details, are the time restrictions on completing the MTR between the November 2021 and February 2022 under 'remote' conditions.

## 2 Project Performance and Impact

### 2.1 Attainment of objectives and planned results

The project has been under implementation since 2016 and, due to COVID-19 and delays due to a change of project manager, is planned for completion in December 2022. The achievements of the project are well summarised in the annual PIR reports and the PCU has prepared a clear assessments on the delivery of outputs per country and per component for each PIR. The PCU updated the assessment of output progress for this MTR (as of September 2021). Due to the staggered start of the project, with the late agreements between the project and Indonesia and Viet Nam, there has been uneven progression in project delivery between Countries.

#### 2.1.1 Achievement of outputs and activities

The PCU has prepared clear assessment of the progress of the project activities and outputs per country, together with progress on regional activities undertaken by the PCU each year to assist with the preparation of the PIRs. The analysis, performed for the MTR, was based on this project management information and complemented by additional material from the PIRs, Project Results Framework and comments received from stakeholders. The synthesis of this information is presented in Annex 7 and progress shown below in Figure 2. This should also be viewed with the expenditure summary provided by the PCU (Annex 6).

The graph shows significant differences in the delivery of the project in the six countries, with three countries having achieved 50% or less progress on the planned activities and outputs.

Early in the project execution the original project manager adjusted the endorsed UNEP budget lines, resulting in significant changes to Component 1 budget (from 1.3 M USD to 0.7 M USD) and increasing Component 4 budget (from 0.5 M USD to 1.1 M USD); the reasoning for these changes is not clear to the MTR. Components 2 and 3 were also slightly reduced (see Annex 6). There were no changes made to the Project Results Framework resulting from these significant budget changes and consequential changes to component ambitions. More discussion is presented in Section 2.5.5 (Financial Management) and Section 2.5.7 (Monitoring and Evaluation).

Overall, the project has delivered approximately 60% of planned activities (and 58% of the overall budget has been expended by September 2021) with 15 months remaining. The PCU reported the completion at the end of September 2021 for each country as: Cambodia 75%, Indonesia 30%, Malaysia 55%, Philippines 44%, Thailand 85% and Viet Nam 21%. An analysis of this information, with MTR comments and ratings at the output level, is provided in Annex 7.

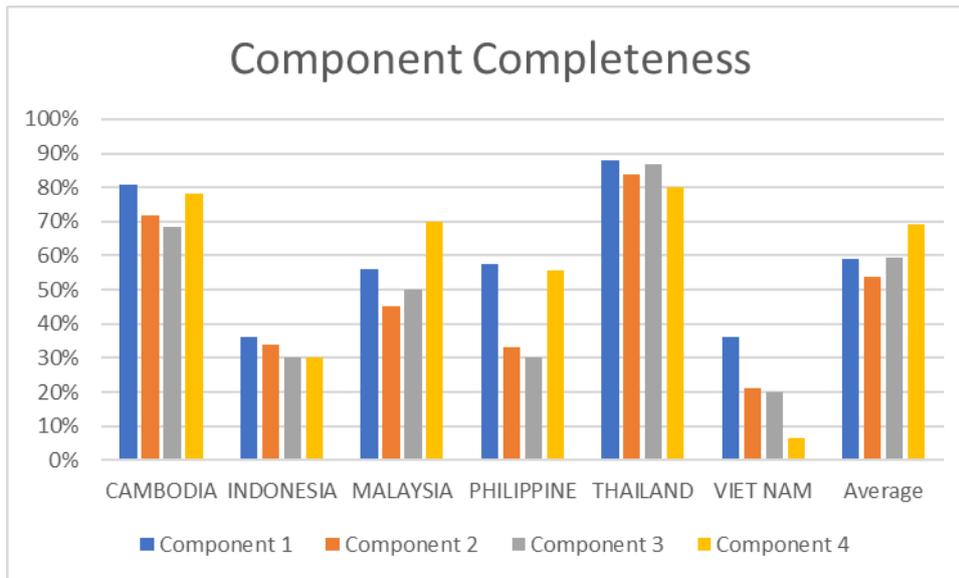


Figure 2 - Component completeness as of 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021 (provided by the PCU)

### Component 1 – Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries *refugia*

The PCU assessed the overall completeness of component 1 at 59% with 55% of the budget spent by September 2021. (Country progress: Cambodia 81%; Indonesia 36%; Malaysia 56%; Philippines 58%; Thailand 88%; Viet Nam 36%)

The project has established a total of 382,400 ha of fisheries *refugia* across the six countries with the agreement of national stakeholders, including specific *refugia* for Blue Swimming Crab, Short Mackerel, prawns and lobsters. The development of national site-specific management plans is on track for the 15 fisheries *refugia* sites and a Regional Action Plan for the Management of Transboundary Species (Short Mackerel) has been adopted by SEAFDEC for endorsement by relevant ASEAN ministries.

Cambodia and Thailand are well advance with the proposed network of management boards and are drafting National Management plans involving the lead national agency and local government partners. Enforcement programmes have been advanced in two countries with local capacity strengthened involving local working groups, however the other countries are indicated by the PCU as having significant work to be completed.

Progress on the development of operational partnerships with GEF the Small Grants Programme has been limited. Consultation has begun with all six countries during the last PSC meeting (November 2021). The expected target at mid-term was that suitable projects would be identified at all sites but the time remaining is clearly limited to achieve the expected contributions to the *refugia* management objectives.

The MTR rates **Component 1 as Moderately Satisfactory**. Significant work is needed in some countries with a year of the planned project extension remaining.

## **Component 2 - Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledgebase for fisheries *refugia* management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand**

The PCU assessed the overall completeness of component 2 at 54% with 31% of the budget spent by September 2021. (Country progress: Cambodia 72%; Indonesia 34%; Malaysia 45%; Philippines 33%; Thailand 84%; Viet Nam 21%)

Component 2 aims to strengthen the management of habitats relevant for transboundary species. Progress at the regional level has been achieved but at the country level there is significant variation on the delivery of expected outputs as a result of the delayed start in some countries and the impacts from COVID.

National policies have been reviewed with relevance to fisheries *refugia* and reforms are in progress in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand with the preparation of national guidelines in most countries underway. At the regional level the PCU has identified best practices from the pilot sites and these will be published shortly.

Fishery information sources (databases, synthesis reports, GIS, etc.) are in preparation and in some cases, complete. The modelling system (Output 2.8) has been agreed by the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee, but further work is required to complete this important tool.

The MTR rates **Component 2** as **Moderately Satisfactory**. Significant work is needed in some countries with a year of the planned project extension remaining.

## **Component 3 - Information Management and Dissemination in support of national and regional-level implementation of the fisheries *refugia* concept in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand**

The PCU assessed the overall completeness of component 3 at 60% with 38% of the budget spent. (Country progress: Cambodia 68%; Indonesia 30%; Malaysia 50%; Philippines 30%; Thailand 87%; Viet Nam 20%)

The project has achieved a good mechanism of providing information at the national and regional levels to support fisheries staff (at all levels) utilise the results and best practices from the fish *refugia* pilot sites through national databases and portals (although in most countries more work is necessary).

A strength of this project has been the wide engagement with stakeholders (at all stages of the project development and implementation) that have been presented to the MTR. The detailed site-specific stakeholder consultation has ensured that local communities were engaged in the formulation of the pilots and involved in the management of activities engendering the acceptance of the fisheries *refugia* approaches.

At the regional level, the project has worked closely with SEAFDEC, acting as the EA and the regional body responsible for regional education in fisheries management), with strong links to ASEAN fishery ministries.

The MTR rates **Component 3** as **Satisfactory**.

## **Component 4 - National and regional cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand**

The PCU assessed the overall completeness of Component 4 at 69% with 85% of the budget spent. (Country progress: Cambodia 78%; Indonesia 30%; Malaysia 70%; Philippines 56%; Thailand 80%; Viet Nam 7%)

The project introduced a governance and management system that has worked effectively through national and regional bodies to facilitate and supervise the technical elements of the project's implementation.

National and regional bodies, the National Fisheries *Refugia* Committees (NFRC), and the National and Regional Scientific and Technical Committees (NTSC and RSTC) have ensured the full endorsement of technical and scientific experts and the involvement of communities and fisherfolk in the decision-making aspects of the project. The meetings were held very frequently (up to four times per year) and this was the main criticism raised to the MTR through stakeholder comments.

Minutes of the meetings of the PSC provide a good overview of the project. An observation from the MTR is that the PSC meetings would have provided a good opportunity for more frequent reviews of the Project Results Framework to ensure that additional outputs (e.g. 2.10) and the number of fisheries *refugia* sites (14 at proposal but 15 in execution) were modified. See Section 2.5.7 (Monitoring and Evaluation) for more details and analysis.

The MTR rates **Component 4** as **Satisfactory**.

Overall, the MTR rates the **Achievement of outputs and activities** as **Moderately Satisfactory**. As emphasised in the introduction to this section, the project has been impacted by the delays in appointing the current project manager and significantly impacted at the national level for COVID restrictions. Despite the two-year project no-cost extension that has been granted by UNEP, the MTR is sceptical if all outputs as presented in the GEF CEO Endorsement Document can be delivered by December 2022 to the expected level given the current level of achievement.

### 2.1.2 Relevance

The SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Fisheries *Refugia* project is relevant to the countries of the region, fisheries organisations and other stakeholders, including coastal communities and fisherfolk. This project is derived from the 2008 South China Sea SAP's recommendations of introducing Fisheries *Refugia*, endorsed by the countries of the region. The Project Document states: *'The Ministers responsible for fisheries in the participating countries have endorsed, through the Intergovernmental SEAFDEC Council, the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Regional Guidelines on the Use of Fisheries Refugia for Sustainable Capture Fisheries Management in Southeast Asia as part of the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia'*.

At the community level the concept of fisheries *refugia* has been largely accepted by coastal communities which is seen as being less restrictive than other no-catch mechanisms to protect habitats (e.g. Marine Protected Areas), although some stakeholders reported that some fisherfolk saw little difference from approaches used prior to the interventions of this project. The project has also been seen as beneficial to local communities through their involvement of the selection in sites and management of the activities, which strengthened local ownership of the fisheries *refugia* concept.

Stakeholders reported that national fisheries bodies responsible for managing fisheries appreciated the pilot projects and the capacity building exercises provided through the project, although several stakeholders considered the financial resources provided by the project for actions was too low at the country level. The approach of wide national engagement in the workplans was considered important by national stakeholders as ensuring the relevance of specific action undertaken in each country (see Section 2.5.4).

At a regional level, the project was also relevant to the work and objectives of SEAFDEC as a regional focus for sharing knowledge and experiences on fisheries and consistent with the ASEAN fisheries ministries goals, especially at developing regional management plans for important transboundary migratory species.

The project contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the countries. The Project Documents indicate that the project directly contributes to:

- SDG 14 Life Below Water (indicators 14.2, 14.4, 14.a, 14b and 14c)

The project also supports the following SDGs:

- SDG 1 No Poverty (Indicator 1b)
- SDG 2 Zero Hunger (indicator 2.4)
- SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production (indicator 12.2)

The project is consistent with the GEF's objectives (see Section 1.2) and UNEP Mid-Term Strategy and Programme of Work (see Sections 2.5.8).

The Project contributes to UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), previously referred to as UN Development Assistance Framework UNDAF actions, specifically:

- Cambodia (2019-2023) – Outcome 3
- Indonesia (2016-2020) – Outcome 1& 3
- Malaysia - Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 –Strategy 6
- Philippines (2019-2023) - Outcome 2
- Thailand (2017-2021) – Outcome 1
- Viet Nam (2017-2021) – Outcome 2

Key comments indicating the relevance from stakeholders include:

- *Co-operative work with a range of stakeholders has led to the Fishery Improvement Programme of the Blue Swimming Crab.*
- *The project had a strong relevance to my organisation which has a mandate to conduct research on fish resources enhancement, management and habitat conservation.*
- *The project is highly relevant to the national fisheries research organisation that will aid the development of policies and regulations for the conservation and management of the fisheries.*
- *The concept of fisheries refugia is new in the region. The concept is highly relevant as alternative management schemes requiring complete special closure. The approach complements the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) which is institutionalised across the country.*

The **Relevance** of this project is rated as **Highly Satisfactory** by the MTR.

### 2.1.3 Effectiveness

The project has been effectively in applying the fisheries *refugia* concepts in 15 locations (12 are in operation and three are planned in Viet Nam) within six countries. The budget for this four-year project was limited given the regional and national expectations, but the project benefited from a strong and detailed Project Document, extensive planning in the Inception Phase, inclusive stakeholder discussions and involvement at the pilot site locations, an influential regional body as the Executing Agency and strong support from the countries having endorsed the regional 2008 SAP for the South China Sea. The project was designed with regional and national supervisory and advisory bodies that were well designed and implemented.

Activities noted in the 2021 PIR as significant achievements include:

- Development of a Regional Action Plan for Transboundary Species;
- Approval of two fisheries *refugia* sites in Cambodia;
- Best practices for Blue Swimming Crab;
- Linking science and management for Spiny Lobster;

Multiple stakeholders identified the effectiveness of the project's implementation in the organisation and content of the capacity development provided and the information made available through the websites/portals. This has capacity development and awareness raising has been well targeted for specific audiences from community to cabinet. Specific examples of awareness raising products are presented in Section 2.5.3 (Stakeholder participation and public awareness).

Key comments indicating the efficiency from stakeholders include:

- *The project implementation via a mechanism of management committee stakeholder consultation leading to acceptance of outputs delivered.*
- *Relevant local organisations were involved in the pilot project sites facilitating the work leading to good implementation.*
- *Involving communities to consider which species should be better managed.*
- *The project has effectively established fisher refugia approach to fish management through stock and habitat linkages. The concept of fisheries refugia, including regulation of fishing with a closed season and the protection of important habitats supports fisheries management.*
- *The project has been effective in delivering outputs that increased knowledge of critical habitats and fish stocks sustainability.*
- *The concept of fisheries refugia are being introduced at the local community and local Government Unit. At first there was a negative reaction as the concept regulates fishing activities, similar to marine protected areas restrictions. However, when fisheries refugia concept was better understood that the restrictions would apply to three days per month to support spawning and juveniles to was accepted leaving three days a month to repair nets and clean boats. This project also led to improved coordination between local communities and government bodies with responsibility of habitat protection.*
- *The project has been successful in the use of scientific information to support fisheries management.*

- *The project has promoted fisheries co-management at local levels.*

However, there were a few negative issues that were raised by stakeholders to-note including:

- *Too many documents/reports were requested by the project and too many ‘details’ of procedure were required by the project.*
- *In some cases, the concept of fisheries refugia was found to be ambiguous for local communities and indistinguishable from the existing management approaches in the country.*
- *The budget was considered limited for conducting activities at the pilot sites.*

The **Effectiveness** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

#### 2.1.4 Efficiency

The project documentation (the CEO Endorsement) considered the project design as cost effective as it *‘encompasses an integrated, cross-sectorial environmental and natural resource management approach that is ideally suited to the unique scale of challenges facing the South China Sea marine basin while simultaneously providing a cost-effective delivery mechanism in a rapidly developing region. Through the project management framework designed for this project, synergies with existing and emerging projects at regional, sub-regional, national and local levels can be achieved and a more cost-effective and expansive engagement with stakeholders assured.’*

The MTR supports this statement with the design of the project being cost-effective with a modest GEF grant (to initiate SAP implementation of fisheries *refugia* in six countries) of 3 M USD and with planned co-financing contribution of over 12.7 M USD. The project design and implementation has had significant and active stakeholder engagement which has greatly assisted the understanding of the fisheries *refugia* concept that has aided the efficiency of execution.

Key milestones in the project development and implantation are summarised in Table 3.

<b>Project milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
PIF Cleared	April 2013
GEF CEO Endorsement	January 2016
Project Start	March 2016
1st Disbursement	August 2016
Project Inception Meeting	November 2016
1 <sup>st</sup> PSC	December 2018
2 <sup>nd</sup> PSC	November 2019
3 <sup>rd</sup> PSC (virtual)	June 2020
4 <sup>th</sup> PSC (virtual)	October 2020
5 <sup>th</sup> PSC (virtual)	September 2021
6 <sup>th</sup> PSC (virtual)	November 2021

Project milestone	Date
MTR	November 2021 – February 2022
Planned completion	December 2020
Revised completion	December 2022

Table 3 - Key project milestones

The project execution has suffered from significant delays, resulting in the PSC meeting in October 2020 (PSC4) approving for a two year no-cost extension (from December 2020 to December 2022). The delays have been attributed to the slow start of the project following the Inception Meeting (November 2016) and the resignation of the initial project manager. The current project manager was appointed in July 2018 with the first PSC meeting held in December 2018. The project has also faced delays with the finalisation of agreements with Indonesia and Viet Nam resulting in these countries only being able to start project activities in 2019. More critically, since March 2020, COVID has had a significant effect on the operation of the project, curtailing in-person workshops, capacity development activities and meetings, including on-site visits to the pilot activities at 15 locations, where internet performance and reliability was limited for remote meetings.

Current expenditure is low (58% reported by the PCU at the end of September 2021 – See Annex 6) considering the duration of the project with one year of the agreed project extension remaining. However, the expenditure is in line with the PCU’s estimate of the progress on outputs (see Annex 7). The project has reported that it has levered 18.32 M USD of co-financing exceeding the planned level anticipated at CEO Endorsement. (See Annex 6). The operational costs for the project during the two-year extension have been funded on a 10% reduction in the unspent budgets from the countries.

Key comments indicating the efficiency from stakeholders include:

- *The project implementation at a national level was slow due to the delay in the agreement signing process.*
- *All workshops, trainings, etc. were established and conducted efficiently*
- *The project duration is too limited to achieve all outputs expected in the workplan. Covid also presented a serious impact, limiting travel and in-person meetings.*
- *The project moved slowly and the project staff were not able to do all the activities on time. Additional training is needed to assist with, for example, the management of the national committee meetings.*
- *The project was delayed in the initial stages and due to covid that has affected site visits to collect data.*

The **Efficiency** of this project is rated as **Moderately Satisfactory** by the MTR.

#### 2.1.5 Review of Theory of Change

A Theory of Change was not completed at the project design stage as it was not a requirement at that time. A reconstructed ToC has been prepared using information from the Project Documents and Results Framework. The reconstructed ToC was submitted in draft form to the Implementing and Executing Agencies in the MTR Inception Report. No comments on this reconstructed ToC were received and it is presented in Annex 5.

## 2.2 Sustainability

### 2.2.1 Socio-political Sustainability

The project has adopted a comprehensive approach to involve local communities, Local Government Units, national fisheries organisations and other stakeholders in both the development of the project and its execution. The establishment of local committees to supervise the pilot sites, supported by awareness raising and capacity development, that increased knowledge of critical habitats and fish stocks sustainability, has gained support from fisherfolk as a sustainable approach to fisheries management with less restrictions than no-catch approaches.

The **Socio-Political Sustainability** of this project is rated as **Likely** by this MTR.

### 2.2.2 Financial Sustainability

The MTR has received multiple reports from National Focal Points from national fishery organisations that expressed support for fisheries *refugia* in their countries. Countries in the region have also endorsed the 2008 South China Sea SAP indicating strong national support for the establishment of fisheries *refugia*. The Philippines, for example will include fisheries *refugia* sites within local management boards which will assure the future of this approach. These observations suggest that there are national commitments to continue and expand the approach as appropriate. The project should continue to support national activities to identify long-term financial support (from multiple sources including private sector, communities and governments) for the fisheries *refugia* approach.

The **Financial Sustainability** of this project is rated as **Likely** by the MTR.

### 2.2.3 Institutional Sustainability

Stakeholders reported that national fisheries authority have recognised the benefits of science-based, participatory and scalable to the management of fisheries. Stakeholders also noted that the project had strengthened fisheries management and were encouraging Local Government Units to consider developing fisheries *refugia* management plans within the overall frameworks adopted on Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM).

At the regional level, the SEAFDEC are well placed as the Executing Agency for this project and as a regional organisation with expertise in fisheries to continue to support the approach of fisheries *refugia* in partnership with ministries responsible for fisheries within ASEAN countries.

The project websites is planned to be supported by the recent GEF South China Sea (SCS) SAP implementation project with the intention that the sites (regional and national) transferred to GEF IW:LEARN to ensure the long-term sustainability of their contents. The original expectation for the fisheries *refugia* and SCS SAP implementation that they would be executed in parallel and share resources. However, the SCS SAP project has only recently been initiated and is in the process of updating the 2008 SAP by undertaking an evaluation of all elements. This continuing work in the region, building on the results of the fisheries *refugia* project's experiences of implementing the fisheries aspects of the SAP, will further support the sustainability by ensuring national ministries and associated inter-ministerial committees continue to utilise results from this project. The MTR recommends that the project manager of the projects brainstorm means to deliver options to deliver expected activities relevant to each project where they can be mutual benefits (e.g. finalisation of

work in Viet Nam and Indonesia through support for project technical management and undertaking an evaluation of the SAP fisheries actions).

The **Institutional Sustainability** of this project is rated as **Highly Likely** by the MTR.

#### 2.2.4 Environmental Sustainability

The project is not expected to have any negative impacts on the environment. The project is aimed at strengthening the management of critical fisheries and biodiversity relevant coastal habitats. However, it is possible that climate change (and extreme weather events) could impact coastal habitats (e.g. mangroves, reefs, etc.) that are critical within fish life cycle.

The **Environmental Sustainability** of this project is rated as **Likely** by the MTR.

The **Overall Sustainability** of this project is rated as **Likely** by the MTR

### 2.3 Catalytic Role

The project is an integral element of the endorsed 2008 SAP for the South China Sea and this project was designed to test the fisheries *refugia* approach to management of these important socio-economic resources in 15 sites (12 fisheries *refugia* sites have been established and three in Viet Nam are anticipated in 2022). The lessons and results from these pilot sites will be documented and distributed across the region, and more widely, for upscaling. These results will also be integrated in the South China Sea SAP implementation project. The project should continue its activities to support the raising of awareness on fisheries *refugia* approaches to ensure that this can be replicated and upscaled across the region.

The project has also had specific catalytic impact on the countries involved in the project (as noted below in 2.4 – Replication)

### 2.4 Replication

The PCU reported the following specific replication actions:

- Malaysia has stated that Department of Fisheries plans to expand the *refugia* programme to cover other commercial fish species.
- Viet Nam developed plans for 46 fisheries management areas (*Refugia*) in their ten-year National Master Plan for Fisheries Development (expected to be approved by Government in mid-2022).
- Cambodia is in the process of scaling-up the program for other target species in Sihanoukville Province.
- Thailand has implemented the *refugia* approach since the first phase on Short Mackerel, this is being expanded to the Andaman Sea to protect the spawners from 1 April to 30 June every year.

Stakeholders interviewed also made reference to countries considering using the experiences from the pilot sites as important references to replicate the approaches at other sites to expand the fisheries *refugia* approach introduced through the 2008 SAP and tested in this project.

The **Catalytic Role** and **Replication** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

## 2.5 Processes affecting attainment of project results

### 2.5.1 Preparation and readiness

The project was developed in response to the endorsed 2008 South China Sea SAP that recommended the establishment of fisheries *refugia* as an appropriate measure to safeguard the coastal habitats and local fisheries dependent on these for community livelihoods. The approach recommended by the SAP is summarised in Section 1.3 (the 'Project').

The Project Document is detailed and clearly written. However, this did not include a gender strategy nor a communication plan for the project's implementation as these were not a requirement at the time of submission. As indicated in Section 2.1.5, a Theory of Change was also not required when the documents were submitted for endorsement.

The Project Results Framework is detailed, but as discussed in Section 2.5.7 would not be considered 'SMART'<sup>2</sup> by current requirements, lacking in particular quantifiable indicators/targets.

The project inception phase led to the development of a significant volume of information on the planned pilot sites and the activities to be undertaken, culminating in an Inception Meeting to present and discuss the approach. Unfortunately, an Inception Meeting Report was not prepared and any recommendations for changes to the planned approach were not captured. It is usually an expectation that the Inception Report provides additional clarity and highlights any changes needed to the project since the original Project Documents were prepared.

The project design also greatly benefited from the active and supportive role of SEAFDEC that aided the credibility of the approach with country stakeholders from fishery ministries and their support provides a good guide to long-term sustainability of the fisheries *refugia* approach.

The **Preparation and Readiness** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

### 2.5.2 Implementation approach and adaptive management

The approach planned for the implementation of the project is described in Section 1.3.2, and this has been followed during execution. A particular strength of the planned approach has been the active involvement of local stakeholders in identifying sites, providing national technical guidance and supervision (through the National Scientific and Technical Committee and Site Management Boards respectively). Whilst this has placed a burden from frequent meetings it has been beneficial in achieving country ownership and acceptance of the fisheries *refugia* approach from coastal communities.

The PCU identified a number of challenges that have been addressed by the project, including:

- The changes to designated persons at the national level with responsibility for the project and the time required by project staff to explain the UNEP/GEF project. The project has assisted with building capacity in the lead agencies (e.g. in Thailand, Indonesia and Viet Nam);
- Changes in country policy on grants for national implementation has resulted in delays in signing agreements between SEAFDEC and the countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound

- Lead agency financial regulations on currency exchange rates which impacted actual expenditure reported at year-end;
- Delays in quarterly fund transfers from UNEP to SEAFDEC and PCU/countries resulting in the pragmatic approach by the Task Manger of transferring funds to cover two quarters

Since the appointment of the current Project Manager, progress reports have been delivered as requested but the timing of financial reports has been uneven (see Section 2.5.5 and comments from the UNEP Fund Management Officer).

The delays in the project execution, resulting from a slow start following inception, the appointment of the current Project Manager and impacts of COVID (see Section 2.1.4) has resulted in an agreed no-cost extension to the project (from December 2020 to December 2022). The PCU and Executing Agency agreed with the countries to reduce their unspent budgets by 10% to cover the regional co-ordination costs of the project extension. This innovative approach to supporting the project co-ordinations during a prolongation to the activities is reported by the PCU to have no impact on the deliverables expected from the countries and will have no impact on the Project Results Framework targets. The MTR considers that the ability to reduce the remaining budget and not have an impact on deliverables as unusual, and for clarity this should be fully documented to ensure stakeholders and the GEF are fully aware of the impacts of budget reductions.

### **Impacts from COVID**

As with all current projects, COVID has had a significant impact on the activities necessitating adaptive management changes. Stakeholders clearly stated that COVID had impacted almost all aspects of the project, reducing in-person meetings, increasing desk studies and reducing site visits that are considered essential for effective execution of projects. Stakeholders noted that a potential benefit of these restrictions has been the use of additional local/national universities and other institutions.

### **Adaptive management actions**

The PCU identified the following examples of adaptive management undertaken by the project.

- The project has used an ocean modelling system from IOC/WESTPAC (Inter-governmental Oceanography Commission for the Western Pacific) rather than use project resources to develop their own model (Output 2.8) as it was agreed to be more cost-efficient.
- Embedding the fisheries *refugia* project in national fishery programmes to enhance implementation. This enabled improved access to data and information obtained from survey vessels from national co-financed resources.
- Additional co-operation with SEAFDEC's programme on gender to assist with mainstreaming in partner countries.

The **Implementation Approach and Adaptive Management** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

### 2.5.3 Stakeholder participation and public awareness

The project development and execution has been undertaken with extensive stakeholder involvement and consultation which has resulted in an effective uptake of the concept of the fisheries *refugia*

approach. This acceptance of these concepts will greatly aid the sustainability and replication of the approach and the replication within the region, supporting the goals of the 2008 South China Sea SAP.

The project has identified over 100 stakeholder groups that have an interest in fisheries including: fisheries and environmental agencies, tourism organisations, public bodies, national navies and coastguards, NGOs, CSOs, academia, research bodies, local government, fishing communities, private sector, etc.

The project developed an extensive website, following the IW:LEARN guidance, and linked this to national portals that support pilot site activities and present reports of national meetings and summaries of achievements. As indicated above, the project websites will be transferred to the South China Sea (SCS) SAP implementation project which will ensure the long-term support through IW:LEARN for the contents. The SCS SAP implantation project will also assist with other communication prepared by the fisheries *refugia* project.

Five countries have prepared social media or issued press releases. The project has not yet prepared IW:LEARN Experience Notes but has participated in a range of IW:LEARN and other sponsored events, including:

- GEF IW:LEARN
  - IW 9 Conference in Marrakesh in 2018
  - EAS Congress/ GEF IW/LME:LEARN Partnership Hub LMEs: An Engine for Achieving SDG 14 Track 4: Governance and Partnerships. Philippines (27 Nov. 2018)
- GEF LME:LEARN sponsored events:
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Asia-Pacific Regional Network Meeting Viet Nam (18 February 2019)
  - LMEs 21: Building Partnerships around LMEs in support of the 2030 SDGs.
  - The Asian Regional Workshop on Data and Information Management, 3-5 December 2019
- Other events
  - Regional Workshop on the Implementation of Aichi Target 11 in the ASEAN Region and the Meeting on Target Setting for the ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment 2016-2025, (2018) Philippines
  - Mangrove for the future: Regional Dialogue on Gender Dimension in Coastal and Fisheries Resources Management in South Asia and Southeast Asia: Opportunities and Challenges
  - Twelfth Intergovernmental Session of the IOC Sub- Commission for the Western Pacific (WESTPAC-XII), the Philippines, 2019;
  - Twenty-fourth Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) Indonesia, 2019
  - Regional Consultative and Planning Workshop towards the UN. Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030)

Recent stakeholder engagement (as reported in the 2021 PIR) includes:

- Capacity building on the concept of fisheries *refugia* and the objectives for setting fisheries *refugia* in the community sea area.

- Support to socio-economic survey and study conducted by local partners (CSOs, institutions) and central government
- Identification of threats and solutions to protect marine ecosystem, and to protect the priority species under the *refugia* concept
- Selection and demarcation of fisheries *refugia* area, which is based on the scientific-based findings presented by national scientific and technical committee.
- Engagement in the formulation of management measures at fisheries *refugia* sites
- Support to the monitoring and enforcement at fisheries *refugia* sites under the Provincial's fisheries management Order.

The project has supported the strengthening of the Regional Education and Awareness Centre within SEAFDEC's training department which acts as a mechanism to share experiences from the project with all ASEAN including the six countries participating in this project. The project has produced and shared many guidance documents and lessons through its website and via SEAFDEC's channels including:

- Fisheries *refugia* concepts<sup>3</sup>
- Novel approaches to achieve healthy ecosystems - fisheries *refugia*<sup>4</sup>
- Coastal zone management in the context of fisheries *refugia*<sup>5</sup>.
- Expert discussions for establishing the spiny lobster and tiger prawn *refugia* in Malaysia<sup>6</sup>
- Managing transboundary fisheries<sup>7</sup>
- Ocean forecasting systems<sup>8</sup>
- Changing attitudes to achieve the restoration of the Blue Swimming Crab<sup>9</sup>.

Comments received from stakeholders include:

- *The project has engaged a high number of stakeholders. The project has strengthened, engaged and increased awareness in a wide range of interested stakeholders from government fisheries ministries, academics, NGOs, local fisher communities, etc. A beneficial example of stakeholder involvement includes the Regional Plan for Management of short-mackerel*
- *Collaboration with Local Government Units was good with the local communities being very co-operative with support to the project. This good involvement and collaboration between Local Government Units has facilitated the acceptance of the fisheries refugia of local government unit and coastal communities and this has been valued by all involved.*
- *Stakeholder participation has provided local knowledge on critical life stages and habitats that are the subject of the interventions in the fisheries refugia.*
- *Stakeholder consultation have been beneficial to specific areas – e.g. the Regional Plan for Management of Short-mackerel that has been developed and agreed.*

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<sup>3</sup> [Fisheries refugia concept in the Gulf of Thailand](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Fisheries Refugia – a Novel Approach to Achieve Healthy Ecosystems](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://fisheries-refugia.org/242-integrated-coastal-zone-management-in-the-context-of-fisheries-refugia-approach>

<sup>6</sup> <https://fisheries-refugia.org/244-final-round-discussion-among-experts-for-setting-the-spiny-lobster-and-tiger-prawn-refugia-in-malaysia>

<sup>7</sup> <https://fisheries-refugia.org/233-managing-transboundary-setting>

<sup>8</sup> <https://fisheries-refugia.org/232-apply-the-ocean-forecasting-system-in-the-south-china-sea-and-the-gulf-of-thailand>

<sup>9</sup> <https://fisheries-refugia.org/210-restoration-bsc-thailand>

The **Stakeholder Involvement** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

#### 2.5.4 Country Ownership

Country ownership, engagement and ownership in the fisheries *refugia* concept has been very high throughout the project cycle. The endorsement by the countries of the 2008 South China Sea SAP provided the framework and clear justification for this project. The project has a clear objective of supporting national/regional fisheries and associated habitats which translates into clear socio-economic benefits for coastal communities.

The project development phase engaged widely with countries from local communities to ministries to ensure the pilots and their intended programmes met the needs of stakeholders. However, there were significant delays in finalising agreements with two countries (Indonesia and Viet Nam) following GEF and UNEP approval of the project. This has been attributed by the PCU to requiring more time to explain the formal aspects of the GEF and UNEP agreements. A key lesson is that whilst the project fully explained the purpose of the project and the activities to be undertaken during the PPG phase, more attention should have been paid to the understanding of the GEF/UNEP process associated with in-country activities.

Further benefits to countries also are derived through the support the project delivers to regional organisations objectives (SEAFDEC and ASEAN) and through facilitating national progress on delivering key SDG targets (see Section Relevance 2.1.2 -Relevance).

The **Country Ownership** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

#### 2.5.5 Financial planning and management

The project was approved (by UNEP and the GEF) with a detailed budget presented in the Project Documents. The project's proposed budgets and expenditure reports were presented and approved by the PSC meetings. These budgets followed the UNEP agreed budget lines.

The Project's expenditure per year and per component is presented in Annex 6. This shows that at the end of September 2021, the overall project expenditure was 58% of the total budget, with the revised end-date of December 2022, indicating that significant project activities are still to be completed (consistent with the overall completeness of the project's outputs shown in Figure 2).

The figures presented in Annex 6 for component 1 and component 4 budgets show significant changes between CEO Endorsement and the current PCU figures. Component 1 was reduced by approximated 45% and Component 4 increased by over 50%. The current Project Manager explained that the previous manager had adjusted the original detailed UNEP budget-lines, endorsed by the GEF, without a detailed review of the impacts on specific project component budget, resulting in the current significant changes to the planned costs per component and presumably their ambitions. The PCU has closely followed the UNEP financial reporting but unfortunately did not reformulate these into specific project component budgets.

At CEO endorsement the project anticipated that the co-financing was in excess of 12.7 M USD, and the current (September 2021) figure indicates that 18.32 M USD of co-financing has been delivered by the partners. The MTR notes that the co-financing reports provided by the PCU indicate that the planned amount was 12.46 M USD (not the 12.7 M USD presented in the CEO document) – this should

be clarified in future reports (NB: If this is a real change rather than a reporting error, this may also be an issue that could have been addressed in an agreed Inception Report which provides an opportunity to present updated information to the approved CEO/Project Documents).

The UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO) reported some delays early in the project but with the provision of financial reports, but currently these are delivered on-time. The project was established under an earlier UNEP financial management system with differing reporting requirements. The FMO has assisted with the migration to current reporting, although some aspects (e.g. project management costs) were still in progress or being addressed.

The project has been audited annually at the regional and national levels and consolidated audit reports provided. No significant issues were identified in the latest audit reviewed for this MTR (to December 2019). The 2020 audit has recently been finalised and being sent to the UNEP FMO.

The project has undergone three budget revisions (September 2019, June 2020 and December 2021) following approval by the PSC.

Project stakeholders interviewed, including the FMO, identified that staff engaged at national and regional levels would benefit from a deeper understanding of the requirements of UNEP financial management. The FMO suggested that detailed briefings should be an element of the project Inception Meeting to ensure all engaged have a good appreciation of the requirements to ensure more effective and efficient delivery of the project components.

The FMO also recommended that all project inception meetings should include financial staff from the project/partners to receive a briefing from the UNEP FMO to ensure that from the start of the project all relevant personnel have an appreciation of the requirements and approach for efficient and effective financial management and reporting.

The **Financial Planning and Management** of this project is rated as **Moderately Unsatisfactory to Moderately Satisfactory** by the MTR, specifically related to the significant changes to component budgets (and presumably ambition) with limited explanation of justification available.

#### 2.5.6 UNEP supervision and backstopping

The UNEP Task Manager and Fund Management Officer have provided guidance and advice when required to help ensure the progress and financial reports have been delivered. The Task Manager attends the PSC meetings (recently, due to COVID through remote internet meetings).

The Project Manager should continue to seek advice and guidance on UNEP and GEF expectations on technical and financial reporting from the UNEP Task Manager and Fund Management Officer to ensure the effective implementation of the project.

The **UNEP Supervision and Backstopping** of this project is rated as **Satisfactory** by the MTR.

#### 2.5.7 Monitoring and Evaluation

##### 2.5.7.1 M&E design

A detailed and costed M&E plan was presented in the Project Document and the GEF CEO Endorsement submission. The plan included all expected and necessary progress (quarterly, annual, inception, workplans, etc.) and financial (quarterly and certified annual) reports, PIRs, PSC meetings

and made provisions for the MTR and Terminal Evaluation (TE). With the exception of the TE, all reports are the responsibility of the EA and the PCU, to be delivered to the IA and the PSC.

At the time of endorsement, the GEF IW tracking tool was in operation but has been replaced by the GEF 7 core indicators. There was an expectation in the Project Document that the Tracking Tool would be update at mid-term. The Project Manager should confirm with the Task Manger if this is still required. As required in the Project Identification Table (Table 1), the consultant has tentatively suggested GEF 7 Core Indicators that would be relevant to this project. These are:

- Indicator 2.2 Marine protected areas under improved management effectiveness (target 269,500 ha; actual 382,400 ha)
- Indicator 7.1 Level of Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis and Strategic Action Programme (TDA/SAP) formulation and implementation (target '4')
- Indicator 7.2 Level of Regional Legal Agreements and Regional Management Institutions to support its implementation (Target '3')
- Indicator 7.3 Level of National/Local reforms and active participation of Inter-Ministerial Committees (Target '4')
- Indicator 7.4 Level of engagement in IWLEARN through participation and delivery of key products (Target '4')

A detailed Project Results Framework was approved at CEO endorsement. The indicators and targets are very generally formulated and are not 'SMART' by current standards. Few indicators are quantifiable and would merit review before the project reaches the final evaluation.

The budget for Evaluation (shown in the overall regional budget Excel sheet as submitted for CEO endorsement) indicated all costs associated with the mid-term and terminal evaluation (100,000 USD) were included in component 4 costs. There is no clear summary of costs associated with inception or PSC meetings in the Project Document or the CEO Endorsement Document.

The **M&E at design** is rated as **Moderately Satisfactory**.

#### *2.5.7.2 M&E implementation*

As mentioned previously, the Inception Meeting, held in Bangkok in November 2016, was supported with multiple documents summarising the concept of fisheries *refugia*, status and trends of habitats, purpose of the project, management framework, budgets, etc. The MTR considers this to be a very detailed and informative meeting. However, an Inception Report, summarising the Project Document and any changes since this was prepared was not developed and there are no minutes of the Inception Meeting, again summarising any changes or agreements reached by the participants.

The project has prepared PIRs (except in 2017) and quarterly reports as planned. Project Steering Committee meetings were held as indicated in Table 3 - Key project milestones, and minutes of these meetings are available. The minutes of the PSC meetings are very detailed and informative, and stakeholders complimented the project on these summaries.

The project prepares a detailed assessment of the achievement of each output at the regional and country level. This detail at the country level is an example of good practice that should be encouraged within all GEF IW regional projects.

At the start of the project, the original Project Manager made significant changes to the structure of the UNEP budget that was passed to the current Project Manager resulting in approximately 50% changes in budgets for Component 1 and 4. This should have resulted in changes to the Project Results Framework to reflect the change of ambition. There have been no changes to the Project Results Framework since CEO endorsement.

- The project has included an additional output (4.10) to assist Cambodia to identify best practices on fishing gear (originally planned for 2020, but due to COVID delayed until 2022).
- The project has also identified 15 sites to implement pilot activities on fisheries *refugia*, not 14 as planned.
- Output 1.4 indicator (*Increase in the proportion of target community members [minimum of 30 percent women] participating in refugia management, including enforcement, at the site level*) and mid-term target (*Enforcement programmes at 14 fisheries refugia sites, including participatory activities for monitoring, control and surveillance*) do not seem to be well aligned.
- The PCU's assessment of the delivery of expected outputs (in particular from Indonesia and Viet Nam) show that significant work is still required for completion. The MTR offers a good opportunity to review outstanding activities (in the event a further project extension is not requested) and to reflect the realistic targets in a revised Project Results Framework.
- The PCU reported that the recent reduction of the national budgets to cover the PCU costs of the 2-year extension, will not result in any changes to expected deliverables. This should be reconfirmed.

These changes or clarifications have not yet been made in the Project Results Framework and the MTR considers that ensuring that the Results Framework correctly reflects the project is a high priority.

The **M&E Implementation** is rated as **Moderately Satisfactory**.

#### 2.5.8 Complementarity with UNEP programmes and strategies

The project design is consistent with the Healthy and Productive Ecosystems, Subprogramme 3 of Programme of Work (2020-2021 and earlier), and with the UNEP Mid-Term Strategy (MTS) covering the project's execution, through a focus on coastal fisheries and sustainable livelihoods.

#### 2.5.9 Alignment with the Bali Strategic Plan (BSP)

The Bali Strategic Plan for Technology Support and Capacity Building (BSP) is an inter-governmentally agreed framework for strengthening the capacity of governments in developing countries and countries with economies in transition to coherently address their needs, priorities and obligations in the field of the environment.

The project has endeavoured to build capacity on fisheries management within the region and to share the experiences between the six countries involved in this project. The project is consistent with the goals of the BSP.

#### 2.5.10 Gender

The project was not designed with a gender strategy or plan, but the project is following the established SEAFDEC's gender policies. A regional Experts Consultation Workshop on Guidance to Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender Equity and Social Well-being in Fisheries Communities was

convened in August 2018 in Bangkok, and the Workshop was attended by several project partners, NGOs, CSOs and inter-governmental organisations (including, SEAFDEC's Gender Working Team and the ASEAN), etc.

Involvement of women and women's groups are mentioned in the Project Document. Output 1.4 (*Empowered fishing communities, particularly artisanal fishermen and women involved in inshore gleaning and processing, for enforcement of agreed management rules at 14 priority refugia sites in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand*) identifies women as a target for involvement with a minimum of 30% of women participate in *refugia* management and enforcement at the site level, although information is not currently available to assess how this indicator has progressed.

The 2021 PIR indicates that gender information *will* be collected in the Philippines in the 3rd quarter of 2021 through '*Data collection on gender dimension in the value chain of small-scale fisheries and aquaculture*'. The results from activities in Philippines *will* be shared with all countries. To-date this information has not been shared. The fisheries *refugia* project has, so far, supported only one country (Cambodia) to a 'training to trainer' workshop on Gender Mainstreaming in Fisheries *Refugia* Management in 2019.

The PCU has collected sex disaggregated information from all national and regional programmes, but this information has not been analysed or reported yet. It is essential that information is reported and information shared before project completion.

#### 2.5.11 South-South Co-operation

The project is within the regional GEF International Waters programme. Lessons and experiences are shared within the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand region and more widely through the GEF IW:LEARN project which addresses the global GEF IW community of projects.

SEAFDEC (the Executing Agency and regional body with a responsibility on fisheries management and training) further encourages involvement with the ASEAN ministries of fisheries.

Stakeholders have remarked that the project has enhanced capacity of the local communities across the countries involved in managing fisheries resources, and this has been achieved through good co-operation and sharing of information across the region.

### 3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Table 4 - Summary of Ratings

Criterion	Reviewer's Summary Comments	Reviewer's Rating <sup>10</sup>
<b>Attainment of project objectives and results (overall rating)</b> <b>Sub criteria (below)</b>	The project has achieved good acceptance from a range of stakeholders of the benefits of fisheries <i>refugia</i> concepts in line with the expectations of the 2008 SAP	<b>MS</b>
Achievement of outputs and activities	There is a wide level of achievement of outputs between countries due to the delayed start in some cases. The MTR notes the significant reduction in Component 1 budget compared to CEO and this should be fully explained/justified. However, there are clear and important achievements and good local community involvement in the pilot activities	<b>MS</b>
Relevance	The project responds to the regionally endorsed SAP and has support of fishing communities and government officials.	<b>HS</b>
Effectiveness	The project has achieved a 60% deliver of outputs and has been effectively organised with regional and national/local management committees	<b>S</b>
Efficiency	The project has been very delayed due to COVID, the change of project managers and the slow involvement of two countries. Despite the two-year extension the MTR considers that completing the remaining activities and outputs consistent with the GEF endorsed document is very challenging in 12 months.	<b>MS</b>
<b>Sustainability of Project outcomes (overall rating)</b> <b>Sub criteria (below)</b>	The MTR considers the prospect of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> concepts and approaches tested by this project to have the support of a wide range of national and regional stakeholders	<b>L</b>
Socio Political	The project benefits from good political support (derived from the SAP) and strong engagement by the project of communities in the development and management/ implementation of the pilot activities.	<b>L</b>
Financial	National and regional support is strong given the commitment to the SAP and the recognition of the importance of coastal habitats and fisheries for local communities.	<b>L</b>
Institutional framework	There is a very strong fisheries organisation that is well established	<b>HL</b>

<sup>10</sup> Criteria are rated on a six-point scale as follows: Highly Satisfactory (HS); Satisfactory (S); Moderately Satisfactory (MS); Moderately Unsatisfactory (MU); Unsatisfactory (U); Highly Unsatisfactory (HU). **Sustainability** is rated from Highly Likely (HL) to Highly Unlikely (HU) on a four-point scale.

Criterion	Reviewer's Summary Comments	Reviewer's Rating <sup>10</sup>
	(SEAFDEC) with good connections to ASEAN ministries responsible for fisheries.	
Environmental	The project is designed to strengthen coastal management of habitats and fisheries.	L
<b>Catalytic Role</b>	The project has tested the establishment of fisheries <i>refugia</i> at 15 sites and has document the experiences and guidance to encourage further uptake and replication of the approaches	S
<b>Replication</b>		
<b>Preparation and readiness</b>	The SAP provided a significant justification for the project and this was further supported by the countries being further engaged in the development of the activities. A very detailed inception phase that further refined the activities supported the implementation. Although, disappointingly, an Inception Report was not prepared that refined the Project Documents and summarised changes.	S
<b>Country ownership</b>	Support for the SAP assisted with the countries' acceptance and ownership of this project.	S
<b>Stakeholders' participation and public awareness</b>	Throughout the project there has been a high engagement of stakeholders from 'community to cabinet'	S
<b>Implementation approach and adaptive management</b>	The project has been challenged by COVID which has undoubtedly impacted the execution and the ability to share experiences.	S
<b>UNEP Supervision and backstopping</b>	There has been regular contact between the UNEP TM and the Project Manager. The Project Manager should be encouraged to request clarification on GEF and financing requirements from the TM and FMO.	S
<b>Financial planning and Management</b>	<p>Changes to the budgets prior to the appointment of the current project manager led to significant deviations in component budgets (up to 50% changes) and presumably ambitions.</p> <p>These changes should be explained for the terminal evaluation. The project has undergone 3 budget revisions and an approved project extension that has adopted an innovative approach of reducing national unspent budgets by 10% to finance the project to cover the continuing functions of the regional project.</p>	MU - MS

Criterion	Reviewer's Summary Comments	Reviewer's Rating <sup>10</sup>
<b>Monitoring and Evaluation (overall rating)</b> Sub criteria (below)	Most of the requirements have been undertaken. The MTR offers an opportunity to review and update the Results Framework that has not occurred since the project was endorsed by the GEF.	<b>MS</b>
M&E Design	Whilst there is an extensive Results Framework there are few quantifiable indicators/targets	<b>MS</b>
M&E Plan Implementation	The Results Framework should be reviewed in the light of the budget changes approved and the initial changes that made significant adjustments to the component budgets and ambitions. Where possible the sex disaggregated information that is collected by the PCU on participants should be included in the Results Framework and reported in the PIRs	<b>MS</b>
<b>Overall Rating</b>		<b>MS</b>

### 3.1 Conclusions

The SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF fisheries *refugia* project is a planned series of actions in the regionally endorsed 2008 South China Sea SAP. The TDA and SAP identified the high pressure of fishing on the fish stock and related coastal ecosystems that impacted socio-economic conditions through declining ecosystem services. The SAP recommended the establishment of fishery *refugia* to address the problems by drawing on fisheries management concepts that are easily understood at the fishing community level, emphasising sustainable use rather than prohibition.

The development of the Project Document involved extensive engagement with coastal communities and national fisheries stakeholders that has assisted the regional acceptance of the concept of fisheries *refugia*. The project has been executed through SEAFDEC as an appropriate regional body within the ASEAN involved in the project with significant competencies in fisheries management.

SEAFDEC recruited a Project Co-ordination Unit based in their offices in Thailand. The original Project Manager resigned shortly after the project's inception phase and there was a significant delay before appointing a replacement which led to a slow initiation of the project.

The project also struggled to get final signed agreements with Indonesia and Viet Nam, due to questions over contracting arrangements, that has delayed further their progress in the project. As with all projects at present, the fisheries *refugia* project has had to work under varying COVID restrictions since early 2019, and has responded with appropriate adaptive management actions to ensure that meetings and other activities could be undertaken remotely where possible. However, these restrictions have clearly had a significant impact on progress. A two-year no-cost extension was identified by the PSC in 2020 as a necessity and this was granted by UNEP with a revised end-date of December 2022.

The project has successfully launched pilots at 12 sites, with three more planned in Viet Nam to test community-based actions relating to fisheries *refugia*, complemented by significant capacity

development and awareness raising actions, with ten management plans either developed or likely to be approved by 2022. These were well supported through regional and national websites/portals to serve regional and global audiences including local communities. Guidance documents and press releases have been prepared to further engage interested stakeholders.

The project seems to have been very successful at ensuring the concept of fisheries *refugia* approaches, for protecting coastal ecosystems and fisheries, was accepted by the countries and importantly, by coastal communities dependent on fishing for their livelihoods.

Project governance was through a regional Project Steering Committee composed of national focal points, Implementing and Executing Agencies that met regularly as planned (albeit 'virtually' for the last 18 months). Technical guidance was through a Regional Scientific and Technical Committee. These management bodies were mirrored nationally through appropriate committees and advisors.

There have been significant changes to component 1 and 4 budgets that clearly represent changes of ambition to the expected component activities. These changes should be clearly explained and justified prior to the terminal evaluation.

The project has an approved M&E plan at endorsement and whilst the Result Framework is not considered SMART by current standards by this MTR it has been adhered to during execution. The MTR offers the opportunity to update the Results Framework (this has not occurred since CEO endorsement) to ensure that it presents a good reflection of what can be achieved in the remaining time of the project and to address minor changes that have occurred to-date. The project has prepared the necessary management (technical and financial) reports as required.

Stakeholders interviewed have indicated their support for the project and shown their commitment to the concept of fisheries *refugia* which provides confidence to the MTR in the sustainability of the project's actions that is reinforced with the previous national endorsement of the SAP with which this project is aligned. The project has been successful at conveying the concept of fisheries *refugia* to coastal communities that have seen this approach as a viable alternative to 'no-catch' approaches such as Marine Protected Areas.

The PCU had estimated that, at the end of September 2021, the project outputs were approximately 60% delivered, consistent with the overall project budget spent (see Annex 6). Whilst this shows a high level of completeness in some countries, for example Thailand and Cambodia other countries (notably Indonesia and Viet Nam) are significantly behind in the delivery of expected outputs. In addition, the approved project extension has been required that countries unspent budgets were reduced by 10% to cover the regional operation of the project. While the PCU is confident that all planned activities and outputs can be delivered with the reduced budgets, the MTR considers it prudent to carefully reassess the workplan, including the relatively low-level of the output delivery in some cases, when updating the Results Framework. It would also be beneficial to summarise changes to country activities as a consequence of the national budget reductions to ensure that stakeholders and the GEF are fully aware that budget reductions have material impacts on projects.

The fisheries *refugia* project was expected to be implemented in parallel to the GEF South China Sea SAP implementation project, that was addressing other elements of the 2008 SAP and recommending updates to the original SAP. The results from the fisheries *refugia* project will play an important role

in guiding the fishery elements of the SAP updates and it will be beneficial if a review and evaluation of the SAP could be formulated as part of the project's exit strategy. It is understood that the SCS SAP implementation project has resources available to facilitate the updating of the fisheries aspects of the SAP and this should be explored by the PCU.

The MTR considers that the current level of project output deliver (60%) and grant expenditure (58%) appears low given the remaining approved project extension. The MTR considers that a further extension, working in close co-operation with the GEF/UNEP South China Sea SAP implementation project, should be considered.

### 3.2 Lessons learned

Table 5 – Summary of lessons

<b>Lesson 1</b>	<b>Importance of full involvement of stakeholders in the design, execution and management of project activities</b>
Project Context	The fisheries <i>refugia</i> project has adopted a very proactive approach to engaging stakeholders in the initial design (building on the achievements of the 2008 South China Sea SAP) and subsequent implementation through the formation of National Science and Technical, and Management Committees to guide the pilots in 15 sites. This has resulted in a high level of acceptance of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> approach which is viewed as less restrictive than alternative 'no catch' approaches to marine ecosystem protection.
Application of lesson in similar projects	GEF IW projects involving pilot actions with communities should be encouraged to more actively engage local stakeholders at the earliest opportunities to gain acceptance for actions in a range of local and ministerial level stakeholders of novel concepts.
<b>Lesson 2</b>	<b>Importance of Project Inception Reports and updating Project Results Framework.</b>
Project Context	The fisheries <i>refugia</i> project had a detailed inception phase resulting in a wealth of documents and other information that was presented at the inception meeting. Unfortunately this information did not result in a formal project Inception Report that was recognised by the PSC or Inception Meeting as presenting any minor changes to the project design including the Results Framework. The current MTR is using material that was developed 7-8 years ago, including the Results Framework which has also not been updated since CEO endorsement despite two budget revisions and a project extension. The Project Results Framework would benefit from a review of indicators and targets to include more quantifiable indicators.
Application of lesson in similar projects	The Implementing Agency should ensure that all projects deliver an agreed Inception Report that includes any changes to the Results Framework for approval by the PSC and/or Inception Meeting.

<b>Lesson 3</b>	<b>Ensuring partners/countries fully understand the contractual arrangements planned for the implementation of the project</b>
Project Context	As indicated in the above lesson, the project did ensure that there was a wide understanding of the technical aspects of the project that had been formulated in the SAP. However, it is clear that the modality of project execution (e.g. contractual arrangements between the IA, EA and the organisations in-countries executing site-based activities) was not fully understood, resulting in significant delays in initiating project activities in some countries. Stakeholders also raised issues that the country-based staff did not always understand the financial reporting requirements that were required and that further training should have been provided to ease the reporting effort.
Application of lesson in similar projects	GEF IW projects involving pilot or country specific activities should also have the proposed arrangements for implementation fully explained.

### 3.3 Recommendations

Table 6 – Summary of recommendations

<b>Recommendation 1</b>	<b>Seek an additional project extension to complete the remaining work and utilise the budget to deliver expected activities, especially for the countries that have achieved 50% or less of expected outputs</b>
To: PCU	
Context and Justification	<p>Despite a two-year extension the project has only achieved 60% of outputs to the expected level and expended 58% of the available budget. Delays deriving from changes in Project Manager, slow signing of arrangements by countries and COVID have had a significant impact. The MTR considers that a further one-year extension would enable the project to focus on the countries that have achieved less progress to ensure all countries and relevant coastal communities get the maximum benefits from pilot actions to test fisheries <i>refugia</i> approaches.</p> <p>The PCU should explore what resources could be available from the SCS SAP implementation project to enable the finalisation of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> project, e.g. evaluating the need to update the fisheries elements of the 2008 SAP. This could enable the PCU to continue to complete the work in Viet Nam and Indonesia whilst ensuring information required by the SCS SAP implementation project is analysed. This could be a component of the project’s exit strategy documentation (see below)</p>

Responsible	PCU/EA to seek approval from PSC
Timeline	As soon as possible
<b>Recommendation 2</b> To: PCU	<b>Irrespective of Recommendation 1 being accepted, the PCU should revise workplan and Results Framework to ensure that these reflect the current situation and budgets to deliver all remaining expected activities and outputs to be achieved</b>
Context and Justification	<p>The Project Results Framework has not been revised since the CEO document was endorsed, and lacks quantifiable indicators that would be relevant to assessing the achievements of the project, especially being able to demonstrate the level of gender balance of those benefiting from project activities.</p> <p>There is an opportunity at the MTR to present realistic deliverables that reflect the 10% reduction of unspent budgets to fund the current project extension that the MTR consultant believes might have an impact on what can be achieved by the pilots at the national/local level.</p> <p>The PCU should also prepare a clear statement of the project component changes (from the Endorsed CEO Document) with justifications and an assessment of the impacts on the intended ambition of the project.</p> <p>In summary the PCU should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review changes from CEO endorsement for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Component budgets/ambition</li> <li>○ PMC budget</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Ensure that the reallocation of the 10% unspent national budgets to project co-ordination does not increase overall management costs.</li> <li>• Update Results Framework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ensure activities/outputs still relevant</li> <li>○ Where possible, increase the metrics in indicators/targets</li> <li>○ Include sex disaggregated information where it is already collected.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Seek guidance and assistance where needed from the UNEP TM and FMO on budgets, Results Framework, etc.</li> </ul>
Responsible	PCU/EA to seek approval of the PSC

Timeline	In the first quarter of 2022
<b>Recommendation 3</b>  To: PCU	<b>Collate and analyse disaggregated sex data of participants involved in project activities</b>
Context and Justification	Although the project design did not define specific targets for the participation of women and girls in the activities, the project has collected sex disaggregate information from workshops and meetings which is commendable. It would be beneficial to present this information in the next PIR and have the data analysed prior to the Terminal Evaluation.
Responsible	PCU
Timeline	Before PIR submission
<b>Recommendation 4</b>  To: PCU	<b>Develop a clear Exit Strategy for the regional and national sustainability and replication of the activities</b>
Context and Justification	<p>The project has collected a wealth of experiences and information from the pilot sites and regional activities, much of which is presented on the website(s) and at various IW:LEARN and other organisations' events.</p> <p>The exit strategy could also assist the SCS SAP implantation project by evaluating the need to update fisheries elements in the 2008 SAP (currently a responsibility of the SCS project). The two projects have common countries involved and are both addressing aspects of the 2008 SAP.</p> <p>An exit strategy would assist the countries and other stakeholders appreciate the value of this information and offer suggestions about the sustainability and upscaling of pilot actions within ASEAN. Presenting this information in a single publication, web location or considering a final workshop to highlight the achievements of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> project would be beneficial and provide a tangible linkage with the new South China Sea SAP implantation project to further replicate good practices in ecosystem management.</p> <p>The MTR recommends that the project managers of this project and SCS SAP implementation project brainstorm shared approaches to address their project needs. The SCS project requires an update of the fishery aspects of the 2008 SAP and the fisheries <i>refugia</i> project needs</p>

	to complete the project (e.g. Indonesia and Viet Nam) to the level of detail expected in the GEF CEO Endorsement Document.
Responsible	PCU, EA and UNEP
Timeline	Before the end of the project execution
<b>Recommendation 5</b>	<b>Preparation of GEF IW:LEARN Experience Notes</b>
To: PCU	
Context and Justification	GEF IW recommends the preparation of Experience Notes by projects based on practical lessons from the execution. This project has a number of key aspects that would merit sharing through this mechanism including stakeholder involvement in pilot locations (design, implementation and management), lessons from gaining acceptance to the fisheries <i>refugia</i> concept, coastal ecosystem management, etc.
Responsible	PCU and UNEP
Timeline	Before the end of the project execution
<b>Recommendation 6</b>	<b>Ensure regional and national staff (and any replacement staff) engaged in financial management are briefed on the requirements of IA and EA at the start of the project.</b>
To: UNEP and EA	
Context and Justification	Stakeholders and the UNEP Fund Management Officer (FMO) identified that staff and consultants were not sufficiently familiar with the requirements of financial reporting. The FMO suggested that a training session is provided at project inception meetings to act as an induction course on the approaches for complying with UNEP financial reporting and the expectation of the GEF as the donor.
Responsible	UNEP TM and FMO, EA finance officers.
Timeline	At the start (e.g. Inception Meeting) of future regional projects.

## Annex 1 MTR Terms of Reference



### TERMS OF REFERENCE

**Mid-term Review of the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF PROJECT: “Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* In the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand” (GEF ID 5401)**

( Adopted by PSC5 Meeting )

#### INTRODUCTION

This Terms of Reference (TOR) is for the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the UNEP/GEF-SEAFDEC project on “Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries *Refugia* in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand”, hereafter called “*FR project*”. The purpose of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) is to provide an independent assessment of project performance at mid-term, to analyze whether the project is on track, what problems and challenges the project is encountering, and which corrective actions are required so that the project can achieve its intended outcomes by project completion in the most efficient and sustainable way.

#### SECTION 1: PROJECT BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW

##### 1. Project General Information (Table 1)

**Table 1: General information of the FR Project**

Identification	GEF ID.: 5401	Insert Umoja no.:
Project Number + Project Title	<i>Establishment and Operation of a Regional System of Fisheries Refugia in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand</i>	
Duration	<i>Planned</i> 48 months	
months	<i>Extension(s)</i> January 2021	December 2022
Division(s) Implementing the project	DEPI GEF International Waters	
Name of co-implementing Agency	UNEP	
Executing Agency(ies)	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)	
Names of Other Project Partners	Fisheries Administration (FIA), Cambodia	
	The Agency for Marine and Fisheries Research and Human Resources (MMAF), Republic of Indonesia	
	Department of Fisheries (DOF), Malaysia	
	National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI), Department of Agriculture	

	<i>Department of Fisheries (DOF), Thailand</i>	
	<i>Directorate of Fisheries (D-Fish), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Viet Nam</i>	
Project Type	<i>Full Size Project (FSP)</i>	
Project Scope	<i>Regional: South East Asia</i>	
Region ( <i>delete as appropriate</i> )	<i>Asia Pacific</i>	
Names of Beneficiary Countries	<i>Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam</i>	
Programme of Work	<i>Healthy and productive ecosystems</i>	
GEF Focal Area(s)	<i>International Waters</i>	
UNDAF linkages	<i>Cambodia (2016-2018) – Outcome 1 Indonesia (2016-2020) – Outcome 1&amp; 3 Malaysia - *Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 –Strategy 6 Philippines (2012-2018) - Outcome 1&amp; 3 Thailand (2017-2021) – Outcome 1 Viet Nam (2017-2021) – Outcome 2</i>	
Link to relevant SDG target(s) and SDG indicator(s)	<i>SDG Target 14: Indicator 14.2, 14.4 and 14.a SDG Target 1: Indicator 1b SDG Target 2: Indicator 2.4 SDG Target 12: Indicator 12.2</i>	
GEF financing amount	<i>US\$3,000,000</i>	
Co-financing amount	<i>US\$12,717,850</i>	
Date of CEO Endorsement	<i>January 12, 2016</i>	
Start of Implementation	<i>March 21, 2016</i>	
Date of first disbursement	<i>August 25, 2016</i>	
Total disbursement as of 31 Dec 20	<i>US\$1,819,035</i>	
Total expenditure as of 31 Dec 20	<i>US\$ 1,613,844</i>	
Expected Mid-Term Date	<i>4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2020 – 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2021</i>	
Completion Date	<i>Planned</i>	<i>December 31, 2020</i>
	<i>Revised</i>	<i>December 31, 2022</i>
Expected Terminal Evaluation Date	<i>TBD</i>	
Expected Financial Closure Date	<i>TBD</i>	

## 2. Project Rationale

- 1) The South China Sea 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 the South China Sea basin are subject to intense fishing pressure. This situation of high small-scale fishing pressure and declining fisheries resources has contributed to the adoption 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.

- 2) Although action aimed at reducing the rate of loss of coastal habitats has been implemented by countries bordering the South China Sea, the decadal rate of loss of such habitats remains high, e.g., seagrass beds (30 percent), mangroves (16 percent), and coral reefs (16 percent). 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" 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 in partnership with the government agencies responsible for fisheries in the 6 participating countries, the project is comprised of the following 4 project components.
- 3) Component 1 will result in the establishment of operational management at 14 priority fisheries refugia, with community-based refugia management plans being key outputs. Supporting activities include consultative processes to facilitate agreement among stakeholders on the boundaries of fisheries refugia, identification of key threats to refugia sites, recording of fishing community views regarding appropriate fisheries and habitat management measures, and eliciting stakeholder inputs to management plan review. Refugia management plans will provide rules inter alia on operating requirements for the use of particular classes of fishing vessels or fishing gear within refugia, procedures for adjusting management measures over time, and mechanisms for enforcement. Specific direction is given to drafting of regulations and ordinances required in support of plan implementation.
- 4) Component 2 focuses on strengthening the enabling environment for the formal designation and operational management of refugia. Preparatory activities include legal reviews to identify, inter alia: legal terminology for describing refugia; formal procedures for demarcating boundaries of spatial management areas such as refugia, including requirements for assessing the socioeconomic impacts of management measures and stakeholder consultation; and provisions for decentralizing refugia management to the community level via development of co-management and rights-based approaches. These national reviews are aimed at informing the drafting of required policy and legislative amendments for adoption by competent authorities. This component will also build the national and site-level science and information base required to inform the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of individual refugia and the regional network of sites.
- 5) 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. Supporting activities involve the development of national knowledge management systems on the use of fisheries refugia in capture fisheries

management, and the establishment of a Regional Education and Awareness Centre that will operate as a facility for the production and sharing of information and education materials on fisheries and critical habitat linkages in the South China Sea. Importantly, Component 3 will support the development of indicators to monitor the effectiveness of coastal fisheries management systems established for priority fisheries refugia. A regional program for the compilation of standardized fisheries statistics for use in identifying and managing fisheries refugia will also be developed to support longer-term management.

- 6) At the national-level, 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. Local community action and strengthened 'community to cabinet' linkages will be facilitated via establishment and operation of site-based management boards for fisheries refugia at the 14 priority locations in the South China Sea. Regionally, Component 4 will foster regional cooperation in: the establishment and operation of a regional system of fisheries refugia; and in the integration of scientific knowledge and research outputs with management and policy making. This component also includes project coordination and management activities aimed at: ensuring the timely and cost-effective implementation of regional and national-level activities; and satisfying the reporting requirements of UNEP and the GEF.
- 7) The longer-term goals of this project are to contribute to: improved integration of habitat and biodiversity conservation considerations in the management of fisheries in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand; improved national management of the threats to fish stock and critical habitat linkages within fisheries refugia; and enhanced uptake of good practice in integrating fisheries management and biodiversity conservation in the design and implementation of regional and national fisheries management systems. The medium-term objectives align with those of the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Program for the South China Sea which are to: build the resilience of Southeast Asian fisheries to the effects of high and increasing levels of fishing effort; improve the understanding among stakeholders, including fisherfolk, scientists, policymakers, and fisheries managers, of ecosystem and fishery linkages as a basis for integrated fisheries and ecosystem/habitat management; and build the capacity of fisheries departments/ministries to engage in meaningful dialogue with the environment sector regarding the improvement of fisheries and management of interactions between fisheries and critical marine habitats. Related end of project targets are:
  - a. by 2022, to have established a regional system of a minimum of fourteen refugia for the management of priority transboundary, fish stocks and endangered species; and
  - b. by 2022, to have prepared and implemented fisheries management systems in the identified priority refugia based on and consistent with, the ASEAN SEAFDEC Regional Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries in Southeast Asia.
- 8) Given the limited integration of the work of fisheries and environment ministries observed in Southeast Asia and many other parts of the world, the establishment and operation of the regional system of fisheries refugia provides an opportunity to learn from a regional fishery sector led initiative to collaborate with the environment sector on integrating fisheries and coastal habitat management. It is anticipated that the experience gained in the South China Sea region through this project will be suitable for application in other marine areas such as the Yellow Sea where over-fishing and the use of inappropriate fishing gear are significant impediments to more sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources and the use of coastal habitats.

### 3. Project Results Framework

- 9) The objective of this project is to operate and expand the network of fisheries refugia in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand for the improved management of fisheries and critical marine habitats linkages to achieve the medium and longer-term goals of the fisheries component of the Strategic Action Program for the South China Sea. The project has four components as listed in **Table 2-5** below with associated expected outcomes and outputs.

Table 2: FR Project Results Framework: Component 1.

Component 1:	Outcomes	Targets End of Project
1. Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries <i>refugia</i> in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	<b>1. Reduced stress on fish stocks and coastal habitats via improved national management of key anthropogenic threats to fisheries and critical habitat linkages in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand</b>	<i>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</i>
	1.1 Fisheries and critical habitat linkages at 14 priority sites in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand safeguarded via the delineation of fisheries <i>refugia</i> boundaries and the setting of priorities for <i>refugia</i> management	Agreement among stakeholders on the boundaries of fisheries <i>refugia</i> , key threats to <i>refugia</i> , and priority management interventions for 14 sites in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
	1.2 Amelioration of key threats to fish stock and critical habitat linkages via the adoption and implementation of community-based <i>refugia</i> management plans at 14 sites	Community-based <i>refugia</i> management plans that are consistent with the FAO and ASEAN-SEAFDEC Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries developed, adopted, and under implementation at 14 fisheries <i>refugia</i> sites
	1.3 Catalysed community action for fisheries <i>refugia</i> management at 14 sites	Networks of management boards and community-based fisheries and habitat management volunteers for <i>refugia</i> management established at 14 fisheries <i>refugia</i> sites
	1.4 Empowered fishing communities, particularly artisanal fishermen and women involved in inshore gleaning and processing, for enforcement of agreed management rules at 14 priority <i>refugia</i> sites in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	Enforcement programmes at 14 fisheries <i>refugia</i> sites, including participatory activities for monitoring, control and surveillance
	1.5 Strengthened civil society and community organisation participation in fisheries <i>refugia</i> management	Operational partnership with the GEF Small Grants Programme to strengthen civil society and community organisation participation in the management of fisheries <i>refugia</i> at 14 sites

- 10) The component 1 aligns with the GEF theory of change framework via implementing strategies, i.e., application of fisheries refugia to significantly reduce stress on fish stocks and coastal habitats. Specifically, component 1 will result in 269,500 ha of fish refugia habitat will be conserved/effectively managed as well as a 50% reduction in fishing pressure within sites at times critical to the life-cycles of fished species of transboundary significance.

Table 3: FR Project Results Framework: Component 2.

Component 2:	Outcomes	Targets End of Project
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2. Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledgebase for fisheries <i>refugia</i> management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	<b>2. Increased institutional capacity in the 6 participating countries for the designation and operational management of fisheries <i>refugia</i> via the transformation of enabling environments and the generation of knowledge for planning</b>	<i>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</i>
	2.1 Strengthened enabling environments for the effective management of the effects of fishing on fisheries and critical habitat linkages in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	Measures for the fisheries sector's sustainable use of fish habitats and biodiversity, and based on site-level models of ecosystem carrying capacity, incorporated in the fisheries policies of participating countries
	2.2 Cross-sectorial agreement on national guidelines for the use of fisheries <i>refugia</i> for integrated fisheries and habitat management	National guidelines on the use of fisheries <i>refugia</i> in integrating fisheries and habitat management developed and endorsed by heads of national government departments responsible for fisheries and environment in the participating countries
	2.3 Endorsed policy, legal, and planning frameworks, both at national and regional levels, for the establishment and management of fisheries <i>refugia</i> , including the reduced use of destructive fishing gear and practices in areas of critical habitats	National policy, legal and planning frameworks for demarcating boundaries and managing <i>refugia</i> assessed and required reforms endorsed in the participating countries and reflected in an updated regional action plan
	2.4 Enhanced access to information relating to status and trends in fish stocks and their habitats in waters of the SCS	Annual synthesis reports of new and additional information and data relating to the stocks of priority fish, crustaceans and molluscs and their habitats published in each country and disseminated at national and regional levels
	2.5 Improved national and regional-level management and sharing of information and data on fish early life history in the waters of the SCS	Establishment and population of 6 online national databases, and 1 regional database, of fish egg and larvae distribution and abundance in national waters and the SCS basin
	2.6 Enhanced access to information relating to the locations and status of coastal habitats and management areas in the SCS and GoT	National and regional online Geographical Information Systems on fisheries and marine biodiversity featuring information on locations and management status of coastal habitats, fisheries <i>refugia</i> , MPAs, and critical habitats for threatened and endangered species
	2.7 Strengthened information base for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of management at priority fisheries <i>refugia</i> sites in the South China Sea and GoT.	Fisheries and habitat data collection programmes operational to characterise 14 priority <i>refugia</i> sites in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand

	2.8 Improved basin-wide understanding of linkages between ocean circulation patterns, nutrient/chlorophyll concentrations, and sources and sinks of fish larvae in the South China Sea	Modelling system linking oceanographic, biochemical, and fish early life history information developed applied to improve regional understanding of fish early life history and links to critical habitats
	2.9 Regionally and locally appropriate best practices generated to address the effects of trawl and motorised push net <sup>1</sup> fishing on seagrass habitat, and the capture of juveniles, pre-recruits and fish in spawning condition	Best practice fishing methods and practices to address key threats to fish stock and critical habitat linkages demonstrated at priority <i>refugia</i>

11) The component 2 aligns with the GEF theory of change framework through strengthening institutional capacity via reform of policy, regulatory and planning frameworks aimed at enabling improved integration of fisheries and environmental management. Additionally, the component will lead to considerable stress reduction. Specifically, the demonstrations of best practice fishing methods and practices aimed at addressing key threats to fish stock and critical habitat linkages, and the adoption of supporting laws, will result in a 20% increase in vessels applying improved gear/techniques to safeguard fish stock and critical habitat linkages.

Table 4: FR Project Results Framework: Component 3.

Component 3:	Outcomes	Targets End of Project
3. Information Management and Dissemination in support of national	<b>3. Strengthened knowledge management and information sharing and access for enhanced uptake of good practice in integrating fisheries</b>	<i>National and regional systems for knowledge management and sharing, including the development of indicator sets and standardized statistics to guide the</i>

and regional-level implementation of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> concept in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	<i>management and biodiversity conservation in the design and implementation of fisheries and environmental management systems, including Marine Spatial Planning</i>	<i>replication, scaling-up and mainstreaming of good practices in the use of fisheries refugia as a spatial planning tool</i>
	3.1 Enhanced uptake of best practices in integrating fisheries management and biodiversity conservation, in the design and implementation of fisheries management systems	Best practice approaches and measures for integrated fisheries and habitat management captured, documented and communicated nationally and regionally
	3.2 Improved community acceptance of area based approaches to fisheries and coastal environmental management	Public awareness and outreach programme to promote local social, economic and environmental benefits of fisheries <i>refugia</i> implemented at 14 priority locations in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
	3.3 Knowledge generated and experiences from establishing and operating fisheries <i>refugia</i> , captured and shared nationally, regionally, and globally	National knowledge management systems on the use of fisheries <i>refugia</i> in capture fisheries management established and operational

	3.4 Information and Education Campaigns for small-scale fisherfolk on the links between fisheries, habitats and biodiversity coordinated regionally through a Regional Education and Awareness Centre	Regional Education and Awareness Centre on fisheries and critical habitats established and operating as a facility for the production and sharing of information and education materials for <i>refugia</i> management
	3.5 Standardised methods for collection and analysis of information and data, for use in assessing the impacts of <i>refugia</i> and in the design appropriate indicators for the longer-term operation of the regional system of fisheries <i>refugia</i>	Regional agreement on standardised information and data collection procedures in support of longer-term operation of a regional system of fisheries <i>refugia</i> , including design of stress reduction and environmental state indicators for managed <i>refugia</i>

12) The component 3 aligns with the GEF theory of change framework through knowledge and information activities aimed at improving information sharing and access, awareness raising, skills building, and monitoring and evaluation.

Table 5: FR Project Results Framework: Component 4

Component 4:	Outcomes	Targets End of Project
4. National and regional cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	<b>Cost-effective and efficient</b> coordination of national and regional level cooperation for integrated fisheries and environmental management	Effective multi-lateral and intergovernmental communication and joint decision-making, including the use of a consensual knowledgebase in planning ecologically and costeffective management actions
	4.1 Strengthened cross-sectorial coordination in the establishment and operation of fisheries <i>refugia</i> in the participating countries	National Fisheries <i>Refugia</i> Committees (NFRC) established in 6 countries, functional and advising national decision-makers and regional <i>fora</i>
	4.2 National scientific and technical expertise and knowledge harnessed to inform policy, legal and institutional reforms for fisheries <i>refugia</i> management in the participating countries	National Technical and Scientific Committees (NTSC) established in 6 countries, functional and advising site-level management boards, the NFRC and the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee
	4.3 Community-led planning of fisheries <i>refugia</i> management at priority locations	Local community action catalysed via establishment and operation of site-based
	in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	management boards for fisheries <i>refugia</i> at 14 locations in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand
	4.4 Regional cooperation in the integration of scientific knowledge and research outputs with management and policy making	Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) established and functioning as a bridge between the scientific community and decision-makers for operation of a regional system of fisheries <i>refugia</i> [biannual meetings]
	4.5 Regional cooperation in the establishment and operation of a regional system of fisheries <i>refugia</i>	Project Steering Committee established and functioning to oversee and act as a principal decision-making body for the project

	4.6 Effective coordination of regional and national-level activities and reporting requirements of UNEP and GEF satisfied	Functioning regional Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) supporting the coordination of regional and national level activities associated with the establishment and operation of regional system of fisheries <i>refugia</i> and meeting reporting requirements of UNEP and the GEF
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#### 4. FR Project Executing Arrangements

- 13) UN Environment Programme is the GEF Implementing Agency for the FR project. The project is 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.
- 14) The Project Coordinating Unit (PCU) locates within the Training Department of SEAFDEC in Samut Prakan Province, Thailand.
- 15) The national lead partners are as follows:
- I. Fisheries Administration (FiA), CAMBODIA
  - II. Agency for Marine and Fisheries Research and Human Resources (AMFRHR), Indonesia
  - III. Department of Fisheries (DOF), MALAYSIA
  - IV. National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDi) in collaboration with Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), Department of Agriculture (DA), the PHILIPPINES
  - V. Department of Fisheries (DOF), THAILAND
  - VI. Directorate of Fisheries (D-Fish), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Department (MARD), VIET NAM
- 16) A Project Steering Committee was established and operated to oversee and act as a principal decision-making body for the project. The PSC's role is to provide managerial and governance advice to the project, and to guide the Project Coordination Unit (PCU) of the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) in the implementation and monitoring of the overall regional project.
- 17) At national level, National Fisheries Refugia Committees (NFRCs) was established and operated to strengthen cross-sectorial coordination in the establishment and management of fisheries refugia. The NFRC's will assume overarching responsibility for the execution of national level activities of the project and will, inter alia: receive, review, and approve reports from the management boards of refugia sites; consider advice from the National Scientific and Technical Committees in decision-making.
- 18) A regional Project Co-ordinating Unit (PCU) was established within SEAFDEC and being led by a Project Director with support from SEAFDEC'S policy, technical and financial units. The PCU will be responsible for: overall leadership, management and technical oversight of the fisheries refugia project; regional project governance, monitoring and reporting; policy/technical advice and advocacy; regional and national coordination, including the establishment of partnerships and networking; and external communications.
- 19) The management framework for this project is depicted in Figure 1. SEAFDEC's linkages with ASEAN through the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Strategic Partnership is depicted in Figure 2.

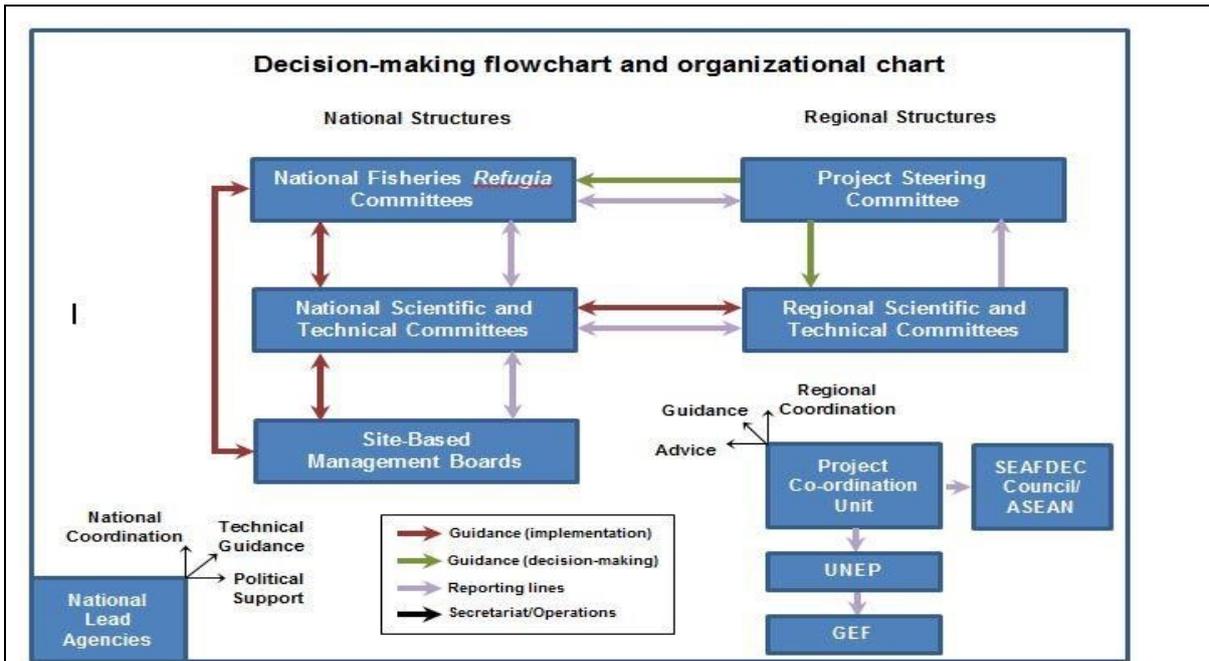


Figure 1: Project management framework for the FR Project

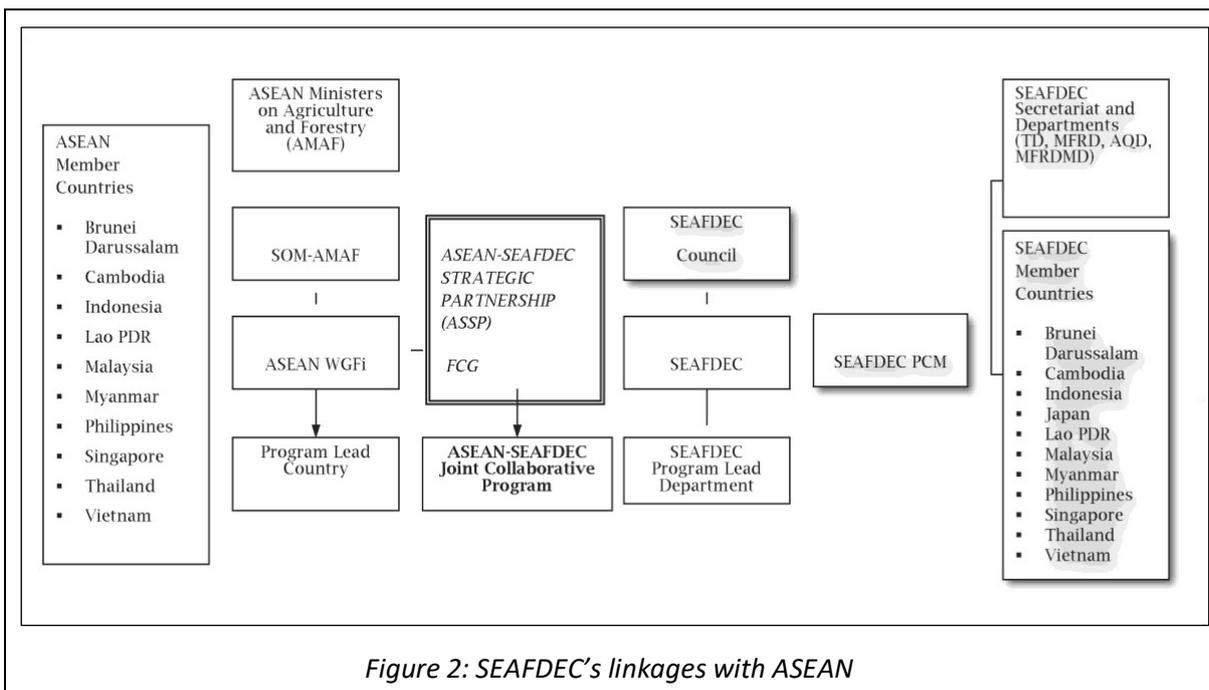


Figure 2: SEAFDEC's linkages with ASEAN

## 5. Project Cost and Financing

20) The total cost of the FR project planned at \$15,717,850 with co-financing of \$12,717,850 and cost to the GEF Trust Fund of \$3,000,000. Table 6 provides an overview of sources of co-financing and Table 7 of cost per project component.

Table 6: an overview of sources of co-financing

Sources of Cofinancing	Name of Co-financier (source)	Type of Cofinancing	Co-financing Amount (\$)
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National Governments	Ministries responsible for fisheries in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam	Cash	1,148,644
National Governments	Ministries responsible for fisheries in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam	In-kind	5,036,806
Multilateral Agencies	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre	Cash	3,876,400
Multilateral Agencies	Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre	In-kind	2,456,000
GEF Agency	UNEP	In-kind	200,000
<b>Total Co-financing</b>			<b>12,717,850</b>

Table 7: Cost per Project Component

Project Component	Indicative Grant Amount (\$)	Indicative Co Financing (\$)
1. Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries <i>refugia</i> in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	1,304,900	3,989,523
2. Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance via national and regional actions to strengthen the enabling environment and knowledgebase for fisheries <i>refugia</i> management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	746,000	5,313,217
3. Information Management and Dissemination in support of national and regional-level implementation of the fisheries <i>refugia</i> concept in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	299,600	1,792,055
4. National and regional cooperation and coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand	499,500	1,423,055
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>2,850,000</b>	<b>12,517,850</b>
<b>Project Management Cost (PMC)</b>	<b>150,000</b>	<b>200,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,000,000</b>	<b>12,717,850</b>

## 6. Project Implementation Issues

- 21) Changing of the key government officers create problems on delay submission for work progress and financing report.
- 22) Delay of the project implementation due to the government policy changes in two participating countries affected on achieving the Mid-term evaluation and End of Project Targets. All participating countries, therefore, requested two years of project extension without an extra budget. The Mid-term evaluation and the end of project evaluation will be conducted by the end of 2020 and 2022, respectively.

## **SECTION 2: OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THE MID-TERM REVIEW**

### **7. Objective of the Mid-Term Review**

23) Objective of the Mid-term Review is to determine the progress, performance, and achievement of objectives and outcomes of the project following five years of implementation from 2016-2020.

### **8. Scope of the Mid-Term Review**

24) The scope of the mid-term evaluation will cover all activities undertaken in the framework of the project. The evaluator will compare planned outputs of the project to actual outcomes and assess the actual results to determine their contribution to attaining the project objectives. The evaluation will diagnose problems and suggest any necessary corrections and adjustments. It will evaluate the efficiency of project management, including the delivery of outputs and activities in terms of quality, quantity, timeliness, and cost-efficiency. The evaluation will also determine the project's likely outcomes and impact concerning the project's specified goals and objectives.

## **SECTION 3: MID-TERM REVIEW APPROACH, METHODS AND DELIVERABLES**

### **9. Approach and Methods**

25) The Mid-term Review of the FR projects will be in-depth evaluations using a participatory approach whereby key stakeholders are kept informed and consulted throughout the evaluation process. Both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods will be used as appropriate to determine project achievements against the expected outputs, outcomes and impacts of the projects. It is highly recommended that the consultant maintains close communication with the project teams and promotes information exchange throughout the evaluation implementation phase in order to increase their (and other stakeholder) ownership of the evaluation findings.

26) The findings of the evaluation will be based on the following:

- i. Desk review of the project document, outputs, monitoring reports (such as quarterly progress reports, mission reports, and the GEF annual Project Implementation Review reports, minutes of meetings, and relevant correspondences.
- ii. Review of specific products including datasets, management, and action plans, publications, and other material and reports.
- iii. Interviews with the Project Director, the Project Task Manager, the Project Participating Countries, the Project Collaborative Partners (if required), and other project staff. iv. Consultations with relevant SEAFDEC/SEC and SEAFDEC/TD staff.
- v. Consultations and interviews with relevant stakeholders involved, including government representatives, local communities, NGOs, private sector, donors, and other UN agencies and international /regional organizations.
- vi. Survey, as deemed appropriate of associated agencies of the FR Project
- vii. Country partner and project sites visits, are not deemed likely due to Covid-19 related travel restrictions, but if appropriated.

### **10. Deliverables**

26) Under the overall supervision of the Project Task Manager and the TOR's Committee, SEAFDEC Secretary-General, relevant SEAFDEC/TD Division, and the overall guidance of the Project Director of the SEAFDEC Project Coordinating Unit, the evaluator shall undertake a MTR of the FR project during the period **October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2022.**

27) The evaluation will comprise the following elements.

- 27.1 A summary evaluation of the project and its major components are undertaken to date and determine progress towards achieving its overall objectives.
- 27.2 Evaluate project performance with the indicators, assumptions, and risks specified in the logical framework matrix and the Project Document. Determine the usefulness of the indicators defined.
- 27.3 An assessment of the scope, quality, and significance of the project outputs produced to date with expected results.
- 27.4 Analysis of the extent of cooperation engendered and synergy created by the project in each of its component activities, between national and regional level activities, and the nature and extent of commitment among the countries involved.
- 27.5 An assessment of the functionality of the institutional structure established and the role of the Steering Committee, the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee, and national committees and working groups.
- 27.6 Identification and, to the extent possible, quantification of any additional outputs and outcomes beyond those specified in the Project Document.
- 27.7 An evaluation of the timetable of activities and allocating financial resources to project activities, and determining their consistency with the Project Document. Where activities or outputs have been delayed, the cause of the delay should be identified, and where appropriate remedial actions proposed.
- 27.8 Identification of the programmatic, financial variance, and adjustments made during the first five years (2016-2020) project and assessing their conformity with decisions of the Steering Committee Group and their appropriateness in terms of the overall objectives of the project.
- 27.9 An evaluation of project coordination, management, and administration provided by the Project Coordinating Unit. This evaluation should include specific reference to:
  - i. Organizational/institutional arrangements for collaboration among the various agencies and institutions involved in project arrangements and execution;
  - ii. Project management effectiveness in terms of assignment and execution of project activities, and flexibility of management in terms of responsiveness to the need for changes in financial allocations, the timing of activities, or mode of operation;
  - iii. The effectiveness of the monitoring mechanisms currently employed by the Project Coordinating Unit in monitoring on a day to day basis, progress in project execution;
  - iv. Administrative, operational, or technical problems and constraints that influenced the effective implementation of the project and present recommendations for any necessary functional changes; and
  - v. Financial management of the project in relation to those on the achievement of substantive outputs.

- 27.10 A qualified assessment of the extent to which project outputs to date have scientific credibility.
- 27.11 Assessment of the extent to which scientific and technical information and knowledge have influenced the execution of the project activities.
- 27.12 An evaluation of the strategy and approaches adopted by the Project Steering Committee and PCU regarding the raising of co-financing support to ensure financial sustainability.
- 27.13 Specification of any deficiencies in project performance, administration, and management that warrant correction with associated recommendations.
- 27.14 Prognosis of the degree to which the project's overall objectives and expected outcomes are likely to be met (see **Annex 1: Rating project success**).
- 27.15 Lessons learned during project implementation and Recommendations regarding any necessary corrections and adjustments to the overall project work plan and timetable to enhance project objectives and outcomes.

#### **11 Consultant for Conduct of the Mid-term Review**

- 28) Consultant shall undertake the evaluation working concurrently and in consultation from 15 **October 2021 to 30 January 2022** (three and a half months).
- 29) Consultant qualification for the Mid-Term Review requires at least a Master's Degree in the field of natural resources management/environmental management or related fields, a minimum of 10 years of professional experience with at least five years of experience related to Monitoring and Evaluation in regional/international context. Experience with evaluation of GEF projects and with cross sectoral management of fisheries resources will be considered assets for the consultancy.
- 30) Consultant shall, at the commencement of the work, agree with SEAFDEC Committee responsible for the conduct of mid-term review, hereafter "TOR's Committee". Members of the Committee shall include the Project Director serve as the Secretary of the TOR's Committee and the Project Task Manager as a member of the TOR's Committee. The procedure for establishment of the TOR's Committee shall follow the SEAFDEC's Guidelines on Procurement of Products and Services including procedure and method of operating to complete all sections of the report. Work plan of the mid-term review will include:
  - i. Tentative proposals for the attendance of consultant at parts or all of the meetings convened during the period of the mid-term review.
  - ii. Proposals for any country visits that shall be deemed appropriate.
  - iii. A delivery schedule for a draft report for comment by the SEAFDEC TOR's Committee, the Project Task Manager, Secretary-General or representatives and the Project Director;
  - and iv. a timetable of the periods each Consultant will work from the Project Co-ordinating Unit for Fisheries Refugia Project at SEAFDEC/TD in Samut Prakan Province, Thailand.
- 31) Regarding the last of these requirements, the SEAFDEC/PCU undertakes to provide office space and internet access to the Consultant (s) during the said period.
- 32) Consultant shall create Workplan constitutes the basis of the agreement between the SEAFDEC and the Consultant.
- 33) The consultant shall attend, if practical, the Regional Scientific and Technical Committee Meeting and/or Project Steering Committee Meeting to be convened during the conduct of evaluation.

34) Consultant’s responsibility to arrange for their visas and immunizations.

## 12 Reporting Format

35) The Mid-Term Review report shall comprise:

- i. A concise summary, prepared by consultant, not exceeding five pages, including findings and recommendations
- ii. A detailed mid-term review report covers items 27.1 - 27.15 of the Terms of Reference above with attention to lessons learned and recommendations. The detailed report without annexes should not exceed 35 pages.
- iii. Annexes prepared by the consultant on specific topics deemed appropriate by the consultant. The annexes should correspond to and amplify the contents of the sections of the main report.

36) The report together with the annexes, shall be written in English and presented electronically in MS Word format (see **Annex 2: Tools, Templates and Guidance Notes** for use in the Mid-Term Review).

## 13 Schedule of the Mid-term Review

37) The table below presents the tentative schedule for the Mid-term Review. *Table*

8. *Tentative schedule for the mid-term review*

Milestone	Tentative Dates
Mid-term Review Initiation Meeting	Starting from 15 <sup>th</sup> October 2021
Inception Report	October 2021
E-based interviews, surveys etc.	November 2021
PowerPoint/presentation on preliminary findings and recommendations	TBD
Draft Main MTR Report to SEAFDEC TOR's Committee, Project Task Manager, SEAFDEC Sec-Gen, the Project Director, and other concerned Partners	20 December 2021
Subject to the receipt by the consultant of comments on the draft report from SEAFDEC TOR's Committee, Project Task Manager, SEAFDEC Sec-Gen, the Project Director, and other concerned Partners	15 January 2022
Final Main Mid-term Review Report	30 January 2022

## 14 Contractual Arrangements

38) The Mid-term Review consultant will be selected and recruited by the SEAFDEC under an individual Special Service Agreement (SSA) on a “fees only” basis (see below). By signing the service contract with SEAFDEC, the consultant certify that he/she has not been associated with the design and implementation of the FR Project in any way which may jeopardize his or her independence and impartiality towards project achievements and project partner performance.

In addition, the consultant will not have any future interests (within six months after completion of the contract) with the projects' executing or implementing units.

- 39) Fees will be paid on an instalment basis, paid on acceptance by the SEAFDEC and Project Task Manager of expected key deliverables. The schedule of payment is as follows:

**Schedule of Payment for the Mid-term Review Consultant:**

<b>Deliverable</b>	<b>Percentage Payment</b>
Approved FR Inception Report (as per annex 2)	20%
Approved FR Draft Main MTR Report (as per annex 2)	40%
Approved FR Final Main MTR Report	40%

- 40) Fees only contracts: Note that during the COVID-19 pandemic travel remains unlikely and therefore purchase of air tickets and Daily Subsistence Allowance for authorized travel mission are not applied
- 41) In case the consultant is not able to provide the deliverables in accordance with these guidelines, and in line with the expected quality standards by the SEAFDEC and acceptance by Project Task Manager, payment may be withheld at the discretion of the SEAFDEC until the consultant has improved the deliverables to meet UNEP's quality standards.
- 42) If the consultant fails to submit a satisfactory final product to SEAFDEC Committee in a timely manner, i.e., before the end date of his/her contract, the Project Task Manager reserves the right to employ additional human resources to finalize the reports, and to reduce the consultant's fee by an amount equal to the additional costs borne by SEAFDEC to bring the reports up to standard.

## **15 SEAFDEC and UNEP Contact Persons**

**1. Mr. Isara Charnrachakij**

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## Annex 1: Rating Project Success

- For this rating, the Consultant, may consider the level of implementation of the activity, such as regional and national levels, and the number of countries involved in each component, action, or output.
- The Consultant may also consider the form of the rating used in the International Waters Program Monitoring Questionnaire prepared by the GEF Monitoring and Evaluation Unit.
- The evaluation will rate the project's success on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being the highest (most successful) rating and 5 being the lowest. The following items should be considered for rating purposes:
  - Achievement of objectives and planned results
  - Attainment of outputs and activities
  - Cost-effectiveness
  - Impact
  - Sustainability
  - Stakeholders participation
  - Country ownership
  - Implementation approach
  - Financial planning
  - Replicability
  - Monitoring and evaluation
- Each item should be rated separately with comments and then an overall rating is given. The following rating system is to be applied:

1=Excellent	>>>	90%-100% achievement
2=Very Good	>>>	75%-89%
3=Good	>>>	60%-74%
4=Satisfactory	>>>	50%-59%
5=Unsatisfactory	>>>	49 % and below

## Annex 2: Tools, Templates and Guidance Notes for use in the Mid-Term Review

The tools, templates and guidance notes listed in the table below, and available from the SEAFDEC, are intended to help Consultant to produce evaluation products that are consistent with each other, and which can be compiled into a biennial Evaluation Synthesis Report. The biennial summary is used to provide an overview of progress to UN Environment Programme and the UN Environment Assembly.

This suite of documents is also intended to make the evaluation process as transparent as possible so that all those involved in the process can participate on an informed basis. It is recognized that the evaluation needs of projects and portfolio vary and adjustments may be necessary so that the purpose of the evaluation process (broadly, accountability and lesson learning), can be met. Such adjustments should be decided between the SEAFDEC Committee and the Consultant in order to produce mid-term review reports that are both useful to project implementers and that produce credible findings.

ADVICE TO CONSULTANTS: As our tools, templates and guidance notes are updated on a continuous basis, kindly download documents from the link in SharePoint will be shared by the SEAFDEC/PCU during the Inception Phase and use those versions throughout the evaluation.

**List of tools, templates and guidance notes available at:**

: <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment-programme/evaluation-office/our-evaluationapproach>

Document	Name
1	Evaluation Process Guidelines for Consultants
2	Evaluation Consultants Team Roles (Principal Evaluator and Evaluation Specialist)
3	List of documents required in the evaluation process
4	Evaluation Criteria (summary of descriptions, as in these terms of reference)
5	Evaluation Ratings Table (only)
6	Matrix Describing Ratings by Criteria
7	Weighting of Ratings (excel)
8	Project Identification Tables
9	Structure and Contents of the Inception Report
10a	Template for the Assessment of the Quality of Project Design (Word template)
10b	Template for the Assessment of the Quality of Project Design (Excel tool)
11	Guidance on Stakeholder Analysis
12	Gender Note for Evaluation Consultants
13	Use of Theory of Change in Project Evaluations
14	Assessment of the Likelihood of Impact Decision Tree (Excel)
15	Possible Evaluation Questions
16	Structure and Contents of the Main Evaluation Report

17	Cover Page, Prelims and Style Sheet for Main Evaluation Report
18	Financial Tables
19	Template for the Assessment of the Quality of the Evaluation Report

## Annex 2 Stakeholders involved in the Mid-Term Review

### Stakeholders responding to MTR questions

Name	Country/Organisation/function
Iswari Ratna Astuti	Indonesia/PSC Member
Joeren S. Yleana	Philippines/PSC Member
Praulai Nootmorn	Thailand/PSC Member/RSTC Member
Chuanpid Chantharawarapit	Thailand/National Fisheries Staff
Nguyen Thi Trang Nhung	Viet Nam/National Fisheries Staff
Weerasak Yingyoud	SEAFDEC/EA
Isara Charnrachkij	SEAFDEC/EA
Worawit Wanchana	SEAFDEC/EA
Somboon Siriraksophon	Project Manager
Noel Barut	Philippines/Consultant
Isabelle Vanderbeck	UNEP/Task Manager
Pooja Bhimjiani	UNEP/Fund Management Officer
Isabelle Vanderbeck	UNEP/Task Manger
Virginie Hart	Project Manager/ South China Sea SAP implementation

## Annex 3 Documents Reviewed

1. PIF
2. Project Document and appendices
3. CEO Endorsement
4. Inception meeting documents
5. ToRs for lead agencies, PCU, NSTC, RSTC, site committees etc.
6. PSC Meeting minutes
7. RSTC Meeting minutes
8. PIRs
9. Financial reports
10. Audits
11. Co-financing reports
12. Project website (including regional portals)
13. Project publications (guidance documents, press releases, etc.)
14. Stakeholder lists

## Annex 4 Interview Questions sent Stakeholders

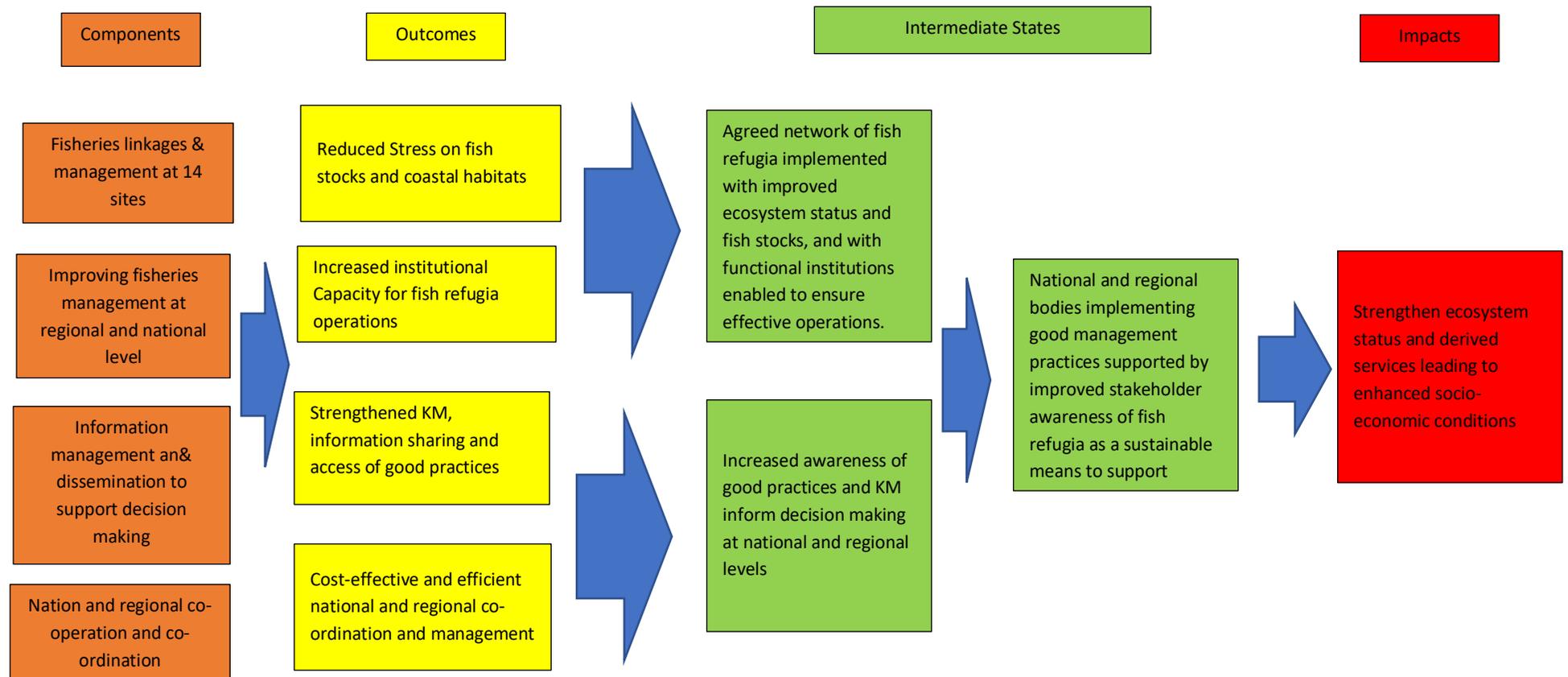
### Mid-Term Review of the UNEP/GEF Fisheries Refugia Project

Please only respond to the questions that are most relevant to you and your work with the project with short comments or give answers as bullets.

1. What was your involvement with the fisheries refugia project?
2. How has the work of the project been relevant to your organisation's activities? Please give some examples.
3. How has the project interacted with other environmental actions in your country? Can you give some examples?
4. In your view, what have been the main achievements and lessons (positive and negative) of the project? Can you give some examples?
5. How has the project assisted with strengthening fisheries management? Please give some examples if possible
6. Do you think that the project has been effective in delivering the outputs you expected? What has been the most and least effective from your perspective?
7. Could you comment on the relevance, timeliness and quality of the (i) workshops, (ii) training, (iii) reports, and (iv) communications delivered by the project, (v) pilot site initiatives, (vi) other activities to your work.
8. What was good/less good in the collaboration with the pilot project sites or other activities in the project?
9. How has the project responded to the impacts from COVID 19? What more could have been done under these circumstances?
10. Are there any other points you would like to highlight?

## Annex 5 Reconstructed Theory of Change

As presented in the MTR Inception Report



**Drivers: -**

Pressure on coastal ecosystem  
 Pressure on fish stocks  
 Regional endorsed SAP recommending *fisheries* refugia supported by countries  
 Strong support from coastal communities through engagement in design and management

**Assumptions:**

COVID impacts  
 Countries complete pilots in allocated time  
 Recommendations adopted for introduction of *fisheries* refugia by national and regional fisheries bodies

## Annex 6 Project costs and co-financing tables

### Project expenditure per component and year

(summarised by the PCU)

Project Component	Total Budget (at CEO Endorsement) USD	Total Budget (PCU figures)	Expenditure 2016	Expenditure 2017	Expenditure 2018	Expenditure 2019	Expenditure 2020	Expenditure 2021 (until 30 <sup>th</sup> Sept)	Total Expenditure	%age spent (vs. PCU figures)
1	1,304,900.00	742,900.00	-	35,798.00	91,668.00	135,878.00	82,466.00	65,955.60	411,765.60	55.43
2	746,000.00	733,000.00	-	4,011.00	905.00	65,963.00	114,837.00	42,686.03	228,402.03	31.16
3	299,600.00	278,600.00	5,730.00	9,819.00	14,729.00	39,932.00	17,223.00	18,175.02	105,608.02	37.91
4	499,500.00	1,127,000.00	85,636.00	203,517.00	197,141.00	239,498.00	221,070.00	8,682.47	955,544.47	84.79
PMC	150,000.00	118,500.00	13,532.00	9,099.00	6,000.00	3,595.00	2,774.00	14,220.94	49,220.94	41.54
<b>Totals</b>	<b>3,000,000.00</b>	<b>3,000,000.00</b>	<b>104,898.00</b>	<b>262,244.00</b>	<b>310,443.00</b>	<b>484,866.00</b>	<b>438,370.00</b>	<b>149,720.06</b>	<b>1,750,541.06</b>	<b>58.35</b>

Highlighted figures represent significant component budget changes.

## Project Co-financing

(Abstracted from the 2021 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter co-financing report)

Co-financing (type/source)	UNEP own financing (mill. US\$)		Government (mill. US\$)		Partner Agency (mill. US\$)		Total (mill. US\$)	
	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual	Planned	Actual
Grants	3.88	3.66	1.08	1.56			4.96	5.22
Loans								
In-kind	2.46	6.38	5.04	6.72			7.50	13.10
Other								
<b>Totals</b>	<b>6.34</b>	<b>10.04</b>	<b>6.12</b>	<b>8.28</b>			<b>12.46</b>	<b>18.32</b>

NB: The planned co-financing presented in the CEO Endorsement was 12,717,850 USD

## Annex 7 Achievements of Output

As reported by PCU to MTR at 30/09/21 (with supporting information from 2021 PIR

Outputs that are 50% or less complete as reported in the PIR – with 12 months of project left.

### Component 1 - Identification and management of fisheries and critical habitat linkages at priority fisheries refugia

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
1.1: Formal agreement among stakeholders on the boundaries of fisheries refugia	Status of boundary delineation and agreement on proposed management interventions	RSTC4 Meeting Report	95%	60%	100%	100%	100%	50%	N/A	84%	The mid-term target has been achieved.  A total of 382,400 ha of fisheries refugia have been established across the six countries with the agreement of national stakeholders [reported in 2021 PIR], including specific refugia for Blue Swimming Crab, Short Mackerel, prawns and lobsters. The PCU assessment indicates that this activity is well on target to be finalised.	S
1.2: 14 * community-based refugia management plans	Status of adoption and implementation of the management plans, total area of fisheries refugia (ha) under management	Key threats to fisheries refugia sites identified	80%	30%	100%	50%	100%	50%	N/A	68%	The mid-term target has been achieved.  A regional Action Plan for Management of Transboundary (on Short Mackerel) has been adopted by SEAFDEC for endorsement by relevant ASEAN ministries. Currently there are 15 locations identified – this should be revised in the Project Results Framework.	S
1.3: Networks of management boards and community-	Status and effectiveness of the management board and volunteer networks		70%	25%	30%	38%	80%	30%	N/A	45%	No mid-term target  Only Cambodia and Thailand have progressed this activity significantly and are drafting National Action plans	MS

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
based fisheries and habitat management											involving the lead national agency and local government partners.	
1.4: Operational enforcement programmes at 14 fisheries refugia sites	Increase in the proportion of target community members [minimum of 30 percent women] participating in refugia management, including enforcement, at the site level	Stakeholder capacity for participation in mgmt. benchmarked	75%	25%	50%	25%	80%	30%	N/A	48%	Mid-term target achieved Fisheries Refugia Working Groups established and local capacity has been strengthened. Data should be collated from the capacity development actions to report number of individuals involved (disaggregated by sex)	S
1.5: Operational partnership with the GEF Small Grants Programme	. Number of GEF Small Grants Programme projects commissioned and implemented in support of refugia management objectives	Suitable GEF SGP proponent identified at 14 sites	85%	40%	0%	75%	80%	20%	N/A	50%	Mid-term target not achieved. Consultation has begun with all six countries and further discussed during the last PSC meeting (November 2021). There remains little time to establish the SGP projects and to integrate into the work of the fisheries refugia project.	MU
<b>Average %</b>			<b>81%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>36%</b>		<b>59%</b>		<b>MS</b>

## Component 2 - Improving the management of critical habitats for fish stocks of transboundary significance

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
2.1 Measures for the fisheries sector's sustainable use of fish habitats and biodiversity	Status of policy revision and endorsement	Proposed policy and legal reforms for promotion of responsible fishing at priority sites formulated  Consultations with fishing industry initiated	80%	50%	40%	25%	100%	0%	N/A	49%	Unclear if mid-term target achieved in all countries  2021 PIR indicates progress on legal reforms and development of plans initiated in Cambodia, Malaysia and Thailand	MS
2.2: National guidelines on the use of fisheries refugia in integrating fisheries and habitat management endorsed	Status of endorsement of national guidelines	Guidelines drafted  National and local consultative process initiated	80%	40%	30%	10%	100%	50%	N/A	52%	Mid-term target achieved  5 out of 6 countries have initiated the drafting of national guidelines	S
2.3: (a) National reports on policy, legal and institutional aspects of refugia establishment and management published; (b) policies and executive orders, provincial/local	Status of endorsement of national fisheries refugia policies, enactment of supporting laws, and plan implementation	Consultations on required policy & legal reforms for refugia demarcation and management initiated	80%	0%	40%	45%	80%	50%	N/A	49%	Mid-term target achieved  The regional action plan has been endorsed by all 6 countries. 2 countries have nationally endorsed plans	S

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
ordinances and by-laws for refugia management developed and endorsed; and (c) 6 endorsed National Action Plans												
2.4 Annual synthesis reports of new and additional information and data relating to the stocks of priority fish, crustaceans and molluscs and their habitats	Volume of new and additional information compiled on: biomass trends; recruitment; fish size; fish habitat area and quality; and volume and value of landings by fishing area and fishing gear use	First annual synthesis reports published	75%	40%	50%	25%	100%	20%	N/A	52%	Mid-term target achieved Information from the SEAFDEC network has been analysed	S
2.5: 6 online national databases, and 1 regional database	Status of national and regional databases and the number of datasets contained therein	National and regional inventories of fish egg and samples prepared  First annual status report on fish early life history research prepared	50%	60%	100%	60%	80%	20%	N/A	62%	Mid-term target not achieved  Not all countries have prepared inventories  National and regional databases in preparation	MS
2.6: 6 national and 1 regional online Geographical	Status of the national and regional GIS and the number of	Regional GIS prepared for online	90%	60%	10%	50%	80%	10%	N/A	50%	Mid-term target not achieved  The regional GIS development is in progress. Updated information will	MS

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
Information Systems	sites presented and characterised										be uploaded every quarter from countries	
2.7 Fisheries and habitat data collection programmes operational to characterise 14 priority refugia sites	Completeness of site characterisations for 14 priority refugia	Site characterisation templates prepared and agreed by NSTC and RSTC	70%	10%	40%	25%	80%	10%	N/A	39%	Mid-term target achieved Not all countries have published refugia profiles (6 out of 15 sites have updated templates)	MS
2.8: Modelling system linking oceanographic, biochemical, and fish early life history information developed	Status of modelling system and extent of its use in decision-making and planning	Scope of work for model development prepared and agreed by NSTC and RSTC	50%	10%	50%	25%	50%	10%	N/A	33%	Mid-term target achieved. The model has been agreed by the National and Regional Scientific and Technical Committees	MS
2.9: Best practice fishing methods and practices	Status of demonstration activities	Threats from fishing to fish stock and critical habitat links identified at 14 priority sites	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	100%	Mid-term target achieved The project will publish best practices from 15 sites in early 2022.	S
Activity 2.10 – Best practice fishing gears (Cambodia)			N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75%	75%		
Average %			72%	34%	45%	33%	84%	21%	100%	54%		

**Component 3 - Information Management & Dissemination in support of national-level implementation of fisheries refugia concept**

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
3.1: Best practice approaches and measures for integrated fisheries and habitat management	Number of best practice approaches and measures tested and codified  Number, scope and reach of communications to share best practices  Demonstrable use of best practices in policy and planning	Online database for cataloguing best practice examples accessible via project website	50%	25%	60%	10%	80%	20%	N/A	41%	Mid-term target achieved  Website has a number of best practices (strengthening regional co-operation for the management of transboundary species; Best practices of Blue Swimming Crab; Linking science and management for spiny lobster; Regional plan of action for transboundary species)	S
3.2: Public awareness and outreach programme	Extent of community acceptance of the use of fisheries refugia in coastal fisheries management	Community acceptance of refugia approach in project Yr 1 benchmarked	85%	40%	80%	40%	100%	20%	N/A	61%	Mid-term target achieved  12 out of 15 sites have completed stakeholder consultation (3 sites in Viet Nam are still planned)	S
3.3: National knowledge management systems	Status of national web portals  Status of publication of GEF IW experience notes	Web portal for the exchange of knowledge on refugia approach accessible online	70%	25%	10%	40%	80%	20%	N/A	41%	Mid-term target achieved  One national portal linked to the regional project site operational. Other portals in progress.  5 articles prepared for release through IW:LEARN	S
3.4: Regional Education and Awareness Centre	Status of the Regional Education and Awareness Centre at SEAFDEC  Volume of information and	none	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	80%	80%	No mid-term target  SEARFTEC and the project work closely and information shared and published.	S

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
	education material compiled, produced and made accessible											
3.5: Regional agreement on standardised information and data collection procedures	Status of regional agreements  Extent of demonstrated use of the agreed procedures in operation of site-level information and data collection programmes	none	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	75%	75%	No mid-term target  Draft guidelines are in progress and will be completed in 2022	S
Average %			68%	30%	50%	30%	87%	20%	78%	60%		

**Component 4 - National and Regional coordination for integrated fish stock and critical habitat management**

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
4.1 National Fisheries Refugia Committees (NFRC) established in 6 countries	Extent and continuity of national government agency participation in National Fisheries Refugia Committee meetings	Quarterly meetings of NFRCs	75%	35.00%	100%	50%	80%	20%	N/A	60%	Mid-term target achieved All countries have established a NFRC	S
4.2 National Technical and Scientific Committees (NTSC) established in 6 countries	Status of the NTSC's and the uptake of the scientific and technical advice they provide	Biannual meetings of NTSCs	85%	15%	100%	50%	80%	0%	N/A	55%	Mid-term target achieved All countries have established a NFRC	S
4.3: Local community action catalysed	Continuity of participation of community stakeholders in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of fisheries refugia management	Quarterly meetings of Site-Based Management Boards	75%	40%	10%	67%	80%	0%	N/A	45%	Mid-term target achieved All countries have established site management Boards	S
4.4: Regional Scientific and Technical Committee (RSTC) established	Status of the RSTC and the uptake of the scientific and technical advice it provides  Continuity of participation of	Biannual meetings of the RSTC	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	85%	85%	Mid-term target achieved	S

Outputs	Indicator	Mid-term target	CAM-BODIA	INDON-ESIA	MALAY-SIA	PHILI-PPINE	THAI-LAND	VIET-NAM	PCU	Average	MTR summary of activity	MTR rating
	members in annual meetings											
4.5: Project Steering Committee established	Status of the PSC and Continuity of participation of members in annual meetings	Annual meetings of the PSC  Completion of Annual Project Implementation Reviews	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	85%	85%	Mid-term target achieved	S
4.6: Functioning regional Project Coordinating Unit			N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	85%	85%		S
Average %			78%	30%	70%	56%	80%	7%	85%	69%		

## Annex 8 Brief CV of MTR Consultants

**Dr Peter Whalley** is a physical chemist who has been working in water and environment management for over 25 years. He has extensive experience of developing appropriate water monitoring networks, nutrient management plans, implementing training programmes and providing trans-boundary support in a range of countries. He has been involved with the development, implementation and compliance checking of the EU Water Framework Directive. For the last fifteen years he has worked on over 20 GEF funded International Waters projects.

These include technical/project management roles: the Danube Regional Project, Tisza River integrated land-water management, Lake Prespa Strategic Action Programme (SAP), Caribbean Large Marine Ecosystem SAP, Amazon, Nubian Aquifer SAP. In addition, he has assisted with project preparation (development of project documents) and, mid-term and terminal evaluations for a for IW, BD and multi-focal area projects for UNDP, UNEP, IDB and the World Bank. He has also been a part of the team evaluating the global and regional UNDP Human Development Reports taking the lead on relevant reports relating to water and climate change. He was also involved for four years assisting UNDP IEO to perform quality assurance checks on terminal evaluations. Specifically, he has been involved in evaluations for GEF International Waters and the Biodiversity Focal Areas including: UNDP Orange River, UNEP/LOICZ Target Research Project, UNEP IWCAM (Caribbean), UNEP/UNDP Pacific IWRM, UNEP Amazon, UNEP Upper Yangtze Biodiversity, UNEP Amazon, UNDP Albania, UNDP Chu Talas River, Marine Protected Areas, UNEP TWAP, UNEP Floods and Drought, UNDP Kura River Basin, etc.

## Annex 9 Response to comments on the draft MTR

Suggested edits have been integrated. There are no outstanding comments or concerns presented to the Consultant on the MTR report for the UNEP/GEF Fisheries *Refugia* Project.