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Fifteenth Meeting of the Coordinating
Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)
on the East Asian Seas Action Plan

Special Session for the UNEP GEF
Project on the South China Sea
Pattaya, Thailand, 11-12 September 2000

The Meeting of National Experts for the
UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea
Pattaya, Thailand, 7-9 September 2000

**REPORT OF THE FIFTEENTH MEETING OF THE
COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA (COBSEA)
ON THE EAST ASIAN SEAS ACTION PLAN**

SPECIAL SESSION FOR THE UNEP GEF PROJECT IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA

&

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF NATIONAL EXPERTS FOR THE
UNEP GEF PROJECT IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**



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INTRODUCTION

1. The Intergovernmental Meeting on the East Asian Seas Action Plan, held in Bangkok, 9-11 December 1981, agreed *inter alia*, to establish the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), to serve as the overall authority to determine the contents of the Action Plan, to review the progress of the Action Plan and to approve its programme of implementation during the annual meetings of the governments (intergovernmental meetings) that participate in the Action Plan. A Meeting of Plenipotentiaries on the East Asian Seas Action Plan (Bangkok, 27-28 October 1994), decided to enlarge the geographic coverage of the Action Plan to enable Australia, Kingdom of Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Republic of Korea and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam to participate in activities concerning the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Coastal and Marine Areas of the East Asian Seas. The decision to revise the Action Plan, originally adopted by five countries of the region in 1981, was taken in order to:

- (a) bring it in line with new developments, particularly with regard to the decisions of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and its programme, Agenda 21;
- (b) allow the addition of the new member-states; and
- (c) take into consideration emerging environmental issues of the past thirteen years.

2. At the Fourteenth Meeting of COBSEA it was decided to hold the COBSEA meeting biennially.

3. The Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in accordance with the above-mentioned institutional arrangements of the Action Plan, and in consultation with National Focal Points of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, convened the Special Session (Fifteenth Meeting) of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia in the Siam Bayshore Resort, Pattaya, Thailand, 11-12 September 2000, which is a special session for the review and adoption of the UNEP GEF project in the South China Sea.

4. Representatives from Australia, Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand attended the meeting. Apologies were received from Korea, Malaysia and Viet Nam for not being able to attend the meeting. The absence of representatives from Korea, Malaysia and Viet Nam was noted with regret. The meeting was attended by the following observers: United States, IOC/WESTPAC of UNESCO, SEAPOL, GEF/UNDP/IMO PEMSEA project, and ASEAMS. The list of participants and observers appears as Annex I to this report.

Agenda Item 1. Opening of the meeting

5. Dr. Hugh Kirkman called the meeting to order and welcomed all participants on behalf of the Secretariat. He invited Mr. Robert Hepworth, Deputy Director of the Division of Environmental Conventions to officially open the meeting. On behalf of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Mr. Hepworth welcomed participants from member countries and organisations participating as observers in the Special Session of the COBSEA, and highlighted the importance which UNEP and the Executive Director attach to the successful conclusion of the preparatory work for the initiation of the UNEP/GEF South China Sea project.

6. Mr. Hepworth recalled the recent shift in the international arena towards delivery of environmental benefits and noted with appreciation that the South China Sea project had a number

of ambitious targets in terms of biodiversity conservation and goals that were to be achieved during the five years of the project.

Agenda Item 2. Organisation of the meeting

(a) Designation of officers

7. The Delegate from Indonesia nominated Dr. Saksit Tridech from Thailand as the Chairperson of the meeting. The nomination was seconded by the delegate from Singapore and Dr. Tridech was duly elected Chairperson by acclamation.

8. The Delegate from Singapore nominated Mr. David Osborn from Australia, as Vice-Chairperson of the meeting. The nomination was seconded by the Delegate from Philippines and Mr. Osborn was duly elected as Vice-Chairperson by acclamation.

9. The delegate from Australia proposed that Mr. Henk Uktolseya from Indonesia be invited to serve as Rapporteur of the meeting. The nomination was seconded by the Delegate from Cambodia and Mr. Uktolseya was duly elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

(b) Organisation of work

10. The Chairperson proposed, and the meeting agreed that, the rules of procedure adopted by UNEP's Governing Council, as applicable to meetings convened by the Executive Director, would apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to this meeting. The Chairperson proposed, and the meeting agreed, to carry out its work in plenary session. The proposed time table was introduced (document UNEP(DEC)/EAS IG.10/INF.4) and accepted by the meeting.

11. Mr. Yihang Jiang, Programme Officer of the EAS/RCU provided information with regard to the working documents and in particular the revised annotated agenda (UNEP(DEC)/EAS IG.10/INF.1 Rev.1) The meeting was informed that one document, the revised version of the Regional Programme of Action for GPA/LBA, originally intended to be presented to the meeting was unfortunately not available. This document should be considered together with a Regional Overview on Social Economic Opportunities of Sewage as regional contributions to the Global Programme of Action.

Agenda Item 3. Adoption of the agenda

12. The revised provisional Agenda was adopted without amendment and is attached as Annex II to this report.

Agenda Item 4. Report of the UNEP Executive Director the progress of the implementation of the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea

13. Mr. Jiang presented the report of the Executive Director regarding progress that has been made since March 1999 with regard to negotiations between the Government of China and the UNEP Secretariat. He expressed appreciation to the Government of China for the constructive approach, hard work and hospitality provided to the UNEP experts during their visits to Beijing, in January and in June 2000. He briefly reviewed the history of development of the project as background for those participants who were not familiar with the project, and outlined the main points of the discussion with the Government of China and the agreements reached during the three rounds of discussion.

14. Mr. Jiang informed the meeting that following the agreements reached, the Project Brief was revised by the UNEP Secretariat, and dispatched to all participating countries for their

review and further comment. Before the Special Session, the Meeting of National Experts for the Project Brief was organised in Pattaya, Thailand, 7-9 September 2000. The report of that meeting together with recommendation would be presented under a separate agenda item.

15. On behalf of his colleagues in the UNEP Secretariat, he expressed gratitude to all participating countries and responsible staff in the GEF secretariat for their continued support and timely advice during the whole process of the negotiations.

Agenda Item 5. Report of the Meeting of National Experts on the UNEP GEF project in the South China Sea 7-9 September 2000

16. Mr. Jiang presented the report of the Meeting of National Experts on the UNEP GEF project in the South China Sea convened immediately prior to the Special Session of COBSEA. He informed the Session that the Meeting of National Experts had worked in a frank and constructive manner and had succeeded in resolving several difficulties raised by the national experts during their consideration of the revised brief.

17. The Chairperson drew the attention of the COBSEA participants to the recommendation of the meeting of national experts that: *“the Special Session of COBSEA for the UNEP GEF South China Sea Project considers and endorses the project brief and that the UNEP Secretariat submit it to the GEF Council for approval.”* He further noted that the meeting urged all participating countries to provide the required Letters of Endorsement to the UNEP Secretariat before September 19th 2000. The recommendation of the Meeting of National Experts is attached as Annex III.

Agenda Item 6. Discussion and Adoption of the Project Brief, “Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand”

18. The meeting was requested to review the progress, and the agreements reached with the Government of China, and to discuss and endorse the revised Project Brief entitled **“Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand”**. It was noted that, although the modifications to the project brief are not major, they nevertheless have significant implications for the scope of planned activities and the modalities of execution of the project. In the light of this it should be recognised that new endorsement letters should be provided, by the GEF Operational Focal Points from each of the participating countries. The full document of the Project Brief is attached as Appendix.

19. In opening the document for discussion the Chairperson noted the country co-financing listed as being both in-cash and in-kind. He suggested that this might cause some difficulties for the countries and requested clarification regarding the manner in which this figure had been derived.

20. In response, Dr. Pernetta indicated that the co-financing consisted of several components, one of which was UNEP co-financing of COBSEA meetings and contributions of time from the staff of the East Asian Seas Regional Co-ordinating Unit. Government co-financing had been calculated in terms of in-kind contributions based on the time of national experts devoted to working on the various aspects of the project together with national funding of activities in the selected demonstration sites. He noted that the details of the co-financing would be finalised during the appraisal phase, and subsequently when specific sites were selected. In addition he noted the anticipated need for cash co-financing from donors of the order of 6 million dollars, which it was felt could be easily raised in support of national level activities.

21. The delegate of Thailand raised the question of the relationship between the co-financing of the project and the associated financing listed in the cover page of the document. It was noted that this matter had been discussed by the experts meeting and that it was a requirement of the GEF procedures to list funding related to other projects in the region that were directed towards

similar objectives as the project under consideration. Such financing is not part of the project funding in the strict sense but, the outcome of these projects and activities would contribute to the achievement of project goals and *vice versa*.

22. At the request of the Chairperson, it was agreed that the Rapporteur would convene a small working group over the lunch break, to discuss the required clarification regarding the nature of government co-financing. Following their work, he reported that the group was recommending the addition of a footnote clarifying that, government co-financing represented the costs of national participation in the project activities. The meeting agreed to accept this addition to the document.

23. Following this the Chairperson invited each delegate to state their position with regard to the adoption of the project brief and all delegates expressed their support for the proposal. The delegate from the Philippines noted that during the expert meeting several of her government's concerns had been addressed and clarified such that she envisaged the letter of endorsement could now be issued.

24. The delegate from China stated that as a consequence of joint efforts from all sides concerned, her government was gratified by the common understanding reached in respect of the project. She expressed the heartfelt admiration and thanks of her delegation to Dr. John Pernetta, Mr. Yihang Jiang and Dr. Hugh Kirkman for their effective, hard work and wisdom in drafting, co-ordinating and organising the revision of the document. She further stated that there should be no difficulty for her government to adopt the project and that the procedures were in hand to provide the required letter of endorsement. Her delegation expects the project to receive approval from the GEF Council and for project implementation of identified activities to proceed smoothly.

25. The delegates from Australia and Singapore noted that, although their countries would not participate directly in the project, they hoped that national expertise from their countries could be involved during individual project activities.

26. The meeting endorsed the project and requested the Secretariat to communicate this decision to Malaysia and Viet Nam, urging them to produce their letters of endorsement prior to the deadline.

Agenda Item 7. Discussion and Adoption of a workplan and timetable for the appraisal phase of the project "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand"

27. Dr. Pernetta informed the meeting that following approval of the Project Brief by the GEF Council, it will be necessary to prepare a full and detailed project document containing the operational level arrangements for execution of the activities. This document should include copies of legal agreements to enable fund transfer to national executing agencies. This document must be prepared by the UNEP Secretariat and cleared by the GEF Secretariat prior to disbursement of funds and commencement of project activities.

28. In order to facilitate this process, Dr. Pernetta drew the attention of the meeting to the draft workplan and timetable. This includes a 6 month appraisal phase during which the countries concerned would need to work out the details of their individual budgets and identify the appropriate national agencies and institutions to be involved in executing the various components of the project. In order to facilitate a speedy conclusion of the process he urged the

representatives to immediately designate their Focal Points for the Project and to convene as promptly as possible, national level meetings to initiate the process of planning the details of country involvement.

29. The delegate from Singapore expressed support for the draft workplan as reflected in the Project Brief. He also expressed his government's desire that the Secretariat should appropriately allocate the limited resources of the RCU amongst all EAS activities including the implementation of the Long-term Plan and the RPA for GPA/LBA.

30. The delegate from Thailand requested information concerning the nomination of representatives to the Project Steering Committee and on the timing of initial actions and meetings of the Committee envisaged by the Secretariat. A similar request for clarification was made by the delegate from Indonesia. In response Dr. Pernetta stated that the procedures for nomination of The Project Steering Committee members were entirely the concern of the participating national governments. As far as the Secretariat was concerned there were no specific requirements regarding the members of this committee who were to be nominated by the individual participating governments. He noted however, the need to ensure adequate consultation at a national level amongst the concerned and involved government departments and institutions, and expressed the hope that, where mechanisms had been established during the preparatory phase for in-country consultation these would be continued and strengthened in the next phase. He further clarified that under the Project Brief it was envisaged that the Committee would meet on an annual basis, to review past progress during the preceding year, and to approve the subsequent year's workplan and timetable. It was further envisaged that the Project Steering Committee would convene its first meeting towards the end of the appraisal phase and prior to the initiation of project activities.

31. The meeting agreed with the workplan and timetable proposed in the Project Brief and noted the advice of Dr. Pernetta regarding nomination of members to the Project Steering Committee.

Agenda Item 8. Other matters

8.1 General review of programme activities since last session

32. Dr. Kirkman informed the meeting of programme activities, which had been implemented following the last meeting of COBSEA. These centred in part, on completion of negotiations to secure the endorsement of China of the South China Sea Project.

33. Mr. Jiang informed the meeting that, since the last COBSEA meeting, the documents on the Regional Programme Action to implement the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-Based Activities in the East Asian Seas region, and the Vision and Plan – A Systematic Approach, had been adopted following the procedures agreed during the Fourteenth Meeting of the COBSEA.

8.1.1 EAS projects on coral reef monitoring and data management

34. Dr. Kirkman outlined the actions taken since the last COBSEA meeting to implement the regional components of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI). He informed the meeting that with financial support from the Government of the United States, the implementation of regional activities on coral reef monitoring and data management had commenced with a regional Workshop on Coral Reef Monitoring and Data Acquisition, held in Phuket, Thailand, 9-11 May 2000. Twenty-eight participants from EAS countries, International Center for Living Aquatic Resources Management (ICLARM), Reef Check, Reef World Foundation, Reefs at Risk, and representatives of dive shop operators attended the workshop. The participants provided presentations on the relevant activities carried out in their countries and by the organisations they represented

35. To follow-up the recommendations made by the workshop, the main activities underway or being negotiated are:

- A Letter of Agreement (LOA) to be concluded between the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Indonesia and Philippines to support coral reef monitoring.
- In co-operation with SEA START RC, a regional metadata system will be established in START to provide the necessary regional information openly to all users. Necessary technical preparation and discussion are underway, and a Letter of Agreement has been concluded.
- In-country and on-the-job training courses in coral reef monitoring and public awareness are planned in Cambodia and China. The Letter of Agreement with Hainan Province, China to organise a UNEP Coral Reef Training Course has been concluded. The training course will be organised in Sanya, China, 8-15 November 2000
- To increase public awareness of the importance of coral reefs, the booklet "Coral Reefs & Mangroves – What we need to know" will be translated into regional languages. A Letter of Agreement to translate it into Chinese is under negotiation with the China Ocean Press.

8.1.2 Adoption and implementation of the Long-term Plan

36. Dr. Kirkman informed the meeting that at the direction of the last session of COBSEA, the Long-term Plan was revised and adopted. The plan had been printed and distributed to all member countries and some actions implemented.

8.1.3 Adoption and implementation of the Regional Programme of Action for GPA/LBA

37. Dr. Kirkman introduced this agenda item by referring to the adoption of this report following the same procedures established by the last session of COBSEA. Following adoption of the document, it was sent to the UNEP GPA Office in the Hague to be printed as one of a series of regional programmes of action. It was unfortunate that the document could not be available to the meeting as it was supposed to have been sent by express mail. The EAS/RCU will send the document to all countries when it becomes available following the meeting.

8.1.4 Global International Water Assessment

38. Dr. Kirkman informed the meeting of the objectives of the Global International Water Assessment (GIWA). He further informed the meeting that the EAS/RCU had participated in the initial activities on testing the GIWA methods in the Gulf of Thailand. Negotiation on the implementation of GIWA components with relevance to the EAS region is under discussion.

8.1.5 GEF PDF-B proposal for "Reducing Loss of Mangrove Forests and Biodiversity through Promotion of Sustainable and Environmentally Sound Shrimp Farming"

39. With reference to the presentation during the last session of COBSEA, Dr. Kirkman informed the meeting on the objectives and progress with regard to the project development. To date the project proposal has received six Letters of Endorsement from among seven participating countries proposed for the GEF PDF Block B phase. Further development of the proposal will depend upon the support of participating countries and securing adequate co-financing

40. The meeting discussed agenda items 8.1.1 through 8.1.5 concurrently.

41. The representative of Australia welcomed the complementary information provided by EAS/RCU. He further stated that as a representative of a country not directly involved in the GEF South China Sea Project, he welcomed the comprehensive information provided by the Secretariat on other matters and hoped that these would be reflected in the report of the meeting. Australia also recommended that member countries of COBSEA be invited to report at future meetings on their efforts to implement the Regional Programme Action and the Long-term Plan.

42. The representative from IOC/WESTPAC requested clarification regarding how the regional project on coral reef monitoring and data acquisition was linked with the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) and Reef Check.

43. In response it was clarified that, co-operation and co-ordination were secured by inviting the representatives from GCRMN and Reef Check to the first workshop of the project organised in Phuket, Thailand, and through production of guidelines consisting of the methods used in GCRMN, Reef Check and ASEAN-Australia Project on Living Marine Resources with instructions on when and how the methods should be applied.

44. The representative from Indonesia informed the meeting regarding the on-going (15- years) programme on Coral Reef Rehabilitation and Management Project (COREMAP), and invited the COBSEA member countries to visit the homepage to obtain necessary information on the project, and to co-operate with the regional efforts for maximising benefits to the country.

Agenda Item 9. Financial arrangements

45. The secretariat reported briefly to the meeting on the financial status of the Action Plan focusing on:

- (a) the financial report for 2000
- (b) contributions to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund

46. Dr. Kirkman informed the meeting that the current contributions from the member countries were inadequate to support the entire costs of operation of the EAS/RCU, which was dependent upon a high level of contributions from UNEP's Environment Fund. He indicated that the possibility existed for a potential reduction in the size of this grant given the financial constraints facing UNEP as a whole and the Regional Seas Programme in particular.

47. Dr. Kirkman confirmed that the UNEP contribution from the Environment Fund will be kept at the same level for 2000.

48. The delegate from China informed the meeting that his government fully intended to make its contributions prior to the closure of the fiscal year.

49. The delegate from the Philippines informed the meeting that considering the current economic situation in the country, there existed a possibility that her government would have to reduce its current level of pledge.

50. Most countries expressed their desire for UNEP to continue supporting the operation of the EAS/RCU from the Environment Fund taking into consideration the current economic situation and the inability of governments to increase their contributions in the immediate future.

51. The meeting instructed the EAS/RCU to review the costs of operation of the EAS/RCU with a view to determining the funding required to maintain the present level of operation.

Agenda Item 10. Workplan and Budget for 2001

52. At the request of the delegate from Australia the Secretariat provided members with the budgets for the operation of the EAS/RCU; for the coral reef monitoring network and for the GEF PDF-B for the South China Sea. It is apparent that the recurrent costs of operation of the Regional Co-ordinating Unit far exceed the annual contributions from the member states. In reviewing these documents the delegate from Australia expressed the wish that such documents be prepared and circulated to member states in advance of future meetings of COBSEA.

53. It was noted that funds for activities were extremely limited. On behalf of the participants the Vice Chairperson expressed his appreciation to the Government of the United States for their generous support to the coral reef monitoring activities and to the International Centre for the Environment Management of Enclosed Seas (EMECS) for their support to the forthcoming International Symposium on Protection and Management of Coastal Marine Ecosystems.

54. The delegate from Singapore noted that a major effort would be required on the part of the Secretariat in support of the South China Sea appraisal phase and expressed the desire for the RCU to develop a comprehensive work plan that would encompass the goals of the EAS Action Plan as expressed in the Long-term Plan, as well as the RPA for GPA/LBA.

55. The delegate from Australia also welcomed the idea for the RCU to develop a comprehensive workplan. He added that a draft workplan should be made available and circulated to all member states prior to future COBSEA meetings.

Agenda Item 11. Adoption of the Report

56. The Rapporteur introduced the draft report of the meeting [UNEP(DEC)/EAS IG.11/3], and invited participants to review and adopt this document as a true record of its deliberations.

57. The meeting reviewed, discussed and amended the draft report and approved the report as contained in this document. On behalf of the participants the Vice-Chairperson thanked the Rapporteur and Secretariat for their prompt and efficient production of the report for consideration by the meeting

Agenda Item 12. Closure of the Meeting

58. Following an exchange of courtesies, the meeting was closed by the Vice-Chairperson, and the representative of the Executive Director, at 13:00 hours, 12 September 2000.

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ANNEX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Organisation of the meeting
 - (a) Designation of officers
 - (b) Organisation of work
3. Adoption of the meeting agenda
4. Executive Director's Report on the Progress of the UNEP GEF project in the South China Sea
5. Report of the Meeting of National Experts on the UNEP GEF project in the South China Sea, 7-9 September 2000
6. Discussion and Adoption of the Project Brief, "Reversing Environmental Degradation in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand"
7. Discussion and Adoption of a workplan and timetable for the appraisal phase of the project "Reversing Environmental Degradation in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand"
8. Other matters
 - 8.1 Report of programme activities since last session
 - 8.1.1 EAS projects on coral reef monitoring and data management
 - 8.1.2 Adoption and implementation of the long-term plan
 - 8.1.3 Adoption and implementation of the Regional Programme of Action for GPA/LBA
 - 8.1.4 Global International Water Assessment
 - 8.1.5 GEF PDF-B proposal for "Reducing Loss of Mangrove Forests and Biodiversity through Promotion of Sustainable and Environmentally Sound Shrimp Farming"
9. Financial arrangements
 - (a) Financial report for 2000
 - (b) Contributions to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund
10. Workplan and Budget for 2001
11. Adoption of the Report
12. Closure of the Meeting

ANNEX III

RECOMMENDATION

The Meeting of National Experts for the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea

having reviewed the development of the project since the Eleventh Session of COBSEA (Manila, Philippines, December 1996), including the preparation of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, the Strategic Action Programme and the Project Brief;

having considered carefully the negotiations between the relevant government departments of China and the UNEP Secretariat on the Project Brief and the proposed modifications;

recognising that the identified project activities are the priority areas of the marine environmental problems in the region, and the process of identification of these priorities was based on scientific analysis of national problems and regional priorities, and on a target-oriented approach;

further recognising that the Project Brief is designed to strengthen regional co-operation among participating countries in order to foster a better understanding of regional marine environmental problems, in particular those with a transboundary nature, and to provide effective means to solve these problems;

bearing in mind that the draft Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea was endorsed by the Thirteenth Session of COBSEA (Bangkok, Thailand, 18-19 November 1998) as a working draft document;

having discussed very thoroughly the modifications made to the Project Brief after negotiations between the Government of China and the UNEP Secretariat, and agreed on the revised version of the Project Brief "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand" with some further amendments;

recommends that the Special Session of COBSEA for the UNEP GEF South China Sea Project considers and endorses the Project Brief, and that the UNEP Secretariat submits it to the GEF Council for approval; and

taking into account the deadline of GEF for submitting the project document, urges all participating countries to provide the Letter of Endorsement to the UNEP Secretariat before 19 September 2000.



**United Nations
Environment
Programme**



UNEP(DEC)/EAS/SCS-

9 September 2000

Original: ENGLISH

EAST ASIAN SEAS ACTION PLAN

The Meeting of National Experts for the
UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea

Pattaya, Thailand, 7-9 September 2000

**REPORT OF THE MEETING OF NATIONAL EXPERTS FOR THE
UNEP GEF PROJECT IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA**

Bangkok, Thailand, September 2000

Agenda Item 1. Opening

1. The Meeting of the National Experts for the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea was convened by the East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit (EAS/RCU) in accordance with the decision of the Fourteenth Meeting of COBSEA. Dr. Hugh Kirkman, the Coordinator of EAS/RCU, opened the meeting. On behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP, Dr. Klaus Töpfer, he welcomed all participants from the member countries and organisations.

2. Dr. Kirkman invited all participants to introduce themselves. The list of participants is attached as Annex I to this report. The participants noted the absence of experts from Malaysia and Viet Nam with regret.

3. Dr. Kirkman briefly introduced the objectives of the meeting and reviewed the progress in negotiating amendments with the Government of China on the UNEP GEF Project Brief **“Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand”**. He explained that after three rounds of discussion with relevant ministries and departments of the Government of China, agreement was reached in June 2000. The Project Brief was modified according to this agreement. The revised version of the Project Brief was sent to all member countries for comments and endorsement at the beginning of August 2000. The objectives of the meeting were to review, discuss and finalise the document, and submit it later to the Special Session of COBSEA for approval.

Agenda Item 2. Organisation of the meeting

4. Dr. Kirkman informed the participants of the arrangements for the meeting. The meeting would work in plenary as far as possible. Drafting groups may be formed for any specific purpose.

5. English was the working language of the meeting.

Agenda Item 3. Adoption of the meeting agenda

6. The meeting adopted the Provisional Agenda as proposed by EAS/RCU, which is attached as Annex II to this report.

Agenda Item 4. Report on the negotiations and modifications to the Project Brief of the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea

7. Mr. Yihang Jiang presented a report on the negotiations and modifications to the Project Brief of the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea focusing on the agreements between the Government of China and the UNEP Secretariat. He expressed appreciation to the Government of China for its hard work with the UNEP experts and its hospitality in receiving the UNEP experts on both visits to Beijing, in January and June 2000.

8. He briefly reviewed the history of the development of the project to provide information to those participants who were not familiar with it. Then he introduced the main points of the discussion with the Government of China and the agreements reached during the three rounds of discussions.

9. Mr. Jiang informed the meeting that after all the agreements were concluded; the Project Brief was revised by the UNEP Secretariat, and dispatched to all participating countries for their

review. This Meeting of National Experts for the project was organised in Pattaya, Thailand, 7-9 September 2000 to precede the Special Session of COBSEA to be convened 11-12 September for the purpose of endorsing the agreed text of the Project Brief.

10. On behalf of his colleagues in the UNEP Secretariat, Mr Jiang expressed his appreciation to all participating countries and responsible staff in the GEF secretariat for their continued support and timely advice during the whole process of the negotiations.

11. Several experts from participating countries asked questions about the modifications to the Project Brief.

12. The expert from the Philippines requested clarification regarding the limited scope and range of project activities, for example, through the change from "coral reef" to "non-oceanic coral reef" and restricting fisheries activities in the Gulf of Thailand.

13. Dr. John Pernetta clarified the matter by informing the meeting that the original proposal made by the Government of China was to remove the coral reef component totally. Considering the global importance of coral reefs in the South China Sea region, it was felt that it would be better to restrict the project activities on coral reefs in such a way as to meet the concerns of the Government of China, whilst at the same time including as many coral systems as possible within the scope of the project.

14. The expert from China expressed the willingness of his government to participate in the project. He further explained that monitoring and research activities would be more effective if they were designed and carried out outside disputed areas. He suggested project activities begin with the easy ones.

15. Dr. Pernetta outlined the status of the project to the meeting, and the process for its further development according to GEF procedures. He informed the meeting that the UNEP GEF Co-ordination Office in Nairobi had maintained close co-operation with the GEF Secretariat during the entire process of discussion and negotiations for the project. He informed the meeting that by March of last year, the Project Brief had been endorsed by six of the seven participating countries. It was withdrawn by UNEP on the request of the Government of China from the work programme of the GEF Council in April 1999. The Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director visited China separately in 1999, to resolve the problem and guide further discussion with the government.

16. Dr. Pernetta presented the schedule for submission of documents to the November meeting of the GEF Council and detailed the deadlines, which need to be met, if the project is to be considered by that meeting. The Project Brief had been formally submitted to the GEF Secretariat for formal review during the UNEP/GEF Project Review meeting scheduled for 19 September 2000. The letters of endorsement from all seven participating countries must be received by UNEP prior to 19 September 2000 for transmission to the GEF Secretariat. The relevant documents are then put on Internet on 25 September 2000 by the GEF Secretariat. If everything goes smoothly, the GEF Council will consider the project on 3 November, and all GEF Council members will be given 30 days to provide comments.

17. The expert from the Philippines asked what would happen if the letters of endorsement were not received from all participating countries on time. The meeting was informed that if this were the case, the project could be delayed for a minimum of another six months.

Agenda Item 5. Discussion on the Modifications of the Project Brief, “Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand”

18. Understanding the status of the project and the schedule, the meeting decided to go carefully through the project document. Further modifications were made during this discussion; the main decisions on the modifications are as following points.

19. At the request of the Government of China, Mr. Jiang read out the proposal of China to remove all organisations listed under “Associated Financing”. Mr. Jiang informed the meeting that a fax was sent back to China to indicate that the list of associated financing is required by GEF.

20. At the request of the meeting, Dr. Pernetta clarified that the associated financing as listed in the document is from on going and planned projects in the region carried out by non-GEF associated organisations that were relevant to this South China Sea Project. The budget listed for these external projects is funding which will not be given to the South China Sea project. The purpose of listing associated financing is to provide information to the Secretariat and GEF Council regarding on-going projects and programmes funded from non-GEF sources that have similar or related objectives to those of the project under consideration and to demonstrate that exhaustive searches for similar projects were made.

21. The meeting instructed the UNEP Secretariat to work with experts from China on this issue and present the results of this discussion on the following day.

22. Following over-night discussions, an expert from China informed the meeting that after fully understanding the GEF requirements; it was not necessary to remove all the organisations listed in the document. However, he requested that the Informal Working Group for the South China Sea be removed as the issues of concern to the Informal Working Group involved disputed areas, these issues should be avoided in this project. He further requested the removal of all references to the Informal Working Group in the document, in respect of future implementation of the project. This was agreed upon, except where the Informal Working Group was mentioned in an historical context.

23. With regard to the involvement of other international organisations, some countries asked how the experiences and project efforts of other organisations, such as FAO could be taken in the project.

24. It was clarified that it is not possible for other international organisations such as FAO to be involved as an Executing Agency for the project. However, during implementation, individuals would be able to consult with the existing programmes in the region to obtain necessary knowledge and experience and individuals from such agencies and programmes could be invited to participate in project activities in their personal capacity.

25. The FAO representative stated that it was unfortunate FAO would not be able to contribute to the project. FAO, he said, was willing to assist in the implementation of the project but not on an *ad hoc* basis. He further indicated that, without the involvement of other international organisations, the management costs of the project would be increased.

26. For effective implementation of the project, extensive discussion was focused on the role

of the Project Steering Committee. Agreement on this issue was reached after consultation and discussion with participating countries. The revised text was incorporated into the Project Brief as follows:

“The Project Steering Committee, as the supreme decision-making body of the project, will be composed solely of representatives of the participating countries of the project. The Committee shall be responsible for reviewing and approving, on an annual basis, project activities, including the location of demonstration sites to be funded by the GEF project. UNEP will act as Secretariat of the Committee. During the execution of the project, decisions of the Project Steering Committee will be made through consultation and on the basis of consensus by all participating countries of the project.”

27. Experts from Indonesia and Philippines expressed their concern at the limitation of fishery activities to the Gulf of Thailand. After an explanation on the negotiations with the Government of China on this issue and a modification made to the Project Brief, the meeting agreed to this component of the project.

28. The meeting completed its discussion on the main body of the Project Brief, and requested the Secretariat to prepare a clean copy, with all agreed modifications incorporated.

29. After re-examining the modifications made in the main body of the Project Brief, the meeting continued with the Annexes to the document. Modification and editorial changes were made in the Annexes. The revised Project Brief was prepared and distributed to the experts attending the meeting, and is attached in full, as Appendix to this report.

Agenda Item 6. Preparation of Recommendations to the Special Session of COBSEA

30. After agreement on the Project Brief, the meeting discussed the issue of formal submission of the Project Brief to the Special Session of COBSEA (Pattaya, Thailand, 11-12 September 2000).

31. The meeting adopted the recommendations shown in Annex III.

Agenda Item 7. Adoption of the Report

32. The report was adopted with amendments and is contained in this document.

Agenda Item 8. Closure of the Meeting

33. In closing the meeting Dr. Kirkman thanked the participants for their hard work and expressed his appreciation for the friendly and constructive manner in which the discussions had been undertaken and agreements reached. The meeting was closed at 1100 hours on Saturday 9 September 2000.

ANNEX I
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ANNEX II

AGENDA

1. Opening of the meeting
2. Organisation of the meeting
3. Adoption of the meeting agenda
4. Report on negotiation aspects and modifications to the Project Brief of the UNEP GEF Project on the South China Sea
5. Discussion of modifications to the Project Brief, "Reversing Environmental Degradation in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand"
6. Preparation of recommendations to the Special Session of COBSEA (Pattaya, Thailand, 11-12 September 2000)
7. Adoption of the Report
8. Closure of the Meeting

ANNEX III

RECOMMENDATION

The Meeting of National Experts for the UNEP GEF Project in the South China Sea

having reviewed the development of the project since the Eleventh Session of COBSEA (Manila, Philippines, December 1996), including the preparation of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis, the Strategic Action Programme and the Project Brief;

having considered carefully the negotiations between the relevant government departments of China and the UNEP Secretariat on the Project Brief and the proposed modifications;

recognising that the identified project activities are the priority areas of the marine environmental problems in the region, and the process of identification of these priorities was based on scientific analysis of national problems and regional priorities, and on a target-oriented approach;

further recognising that the Project Brief is designed to strengthen regional co-operation among participating countries in order to foster a better understanding of regional marine environmental problems, in particular those with a transboundary nature, and to provide effective means to solve these problems;

bearing in mind that the draft Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea was endorsed by the Thirteenth Session of COBSEA (Bangkok, Thailand, 18-19 November 1998) as a working draft document;

having discussed very thoroughly the modifications made to the Project Brief after negotiations between the Government of China and the UNEP Secretariat, and agreed on the revised version of the Project Brief "Reversing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand" with some further amendments;

recommends that the Special Session of COBSEA for the UNEP GEF South China Sea Project considers and endorses the Project Brief, and that the UNEP Secretariat submits it to the GEF Council for approval; and

taking into account the deadline of GEF for submitting the project document, urges all participating countries to provide the Letter of Endorsement to the UNEP Secretariat before 19 September 2000.