

Report

Regional Workshop on the Development and Finalization of the Outlook on
COBSEA follow-up and review of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals



11-12 December 2019

Manila, Philippines

Opening of the workshop

1. The workshop was opened by Engr. Vizmindia Ososio, Assistant Director of the Environment Management Bureau (DENR), welcoming participants to the Philippines. She stressed the importance of the East Asian Seas Action Plan for the protection and conservation of the marine and coastal environment in the East Asian Seas region. The Philippines stands ready to continue supporting COBSEA and the tasks as outlined in the East Asian Seas Action Plan and the COBSEA Strategic Direction, particularly on land-based sources of pollution. She mentioned that the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI) is being used as a reference and guide in the formulation of the National Program of Action (NPOA) on Marine Litter in the Philippines. She hoped that the workshop will serve as a platform to share and gain knowledge in order to strengthen COBSEA and its initiatives.
2. Mr. Jerker Tamelander, COBSEA Coordinator, mentioned that this workshop to discuss ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is timely as COP25, 'the Blue COP', is ongoing, preparations for the UN Ocean Conference in June 2020 are gaining pace, and several of the ocean-related targets of the 2030 Development Agenda are due in 2020. He noted that, while much progress has been made in the region in terms of SDG implementation, tracking and reporting of ocean-related SDGs and in particular SDG 14 requires further effort. He encouraged participants to actively engage in discussions at the workshop and towards further development and finalization of the draft Outlook on COBSEA follow-up and review of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals (hereafter referred to as the Outlook document) in order to reinforce COBSEA's role as a catalyst of actions that support regional delivery of the SDGs and in particular SDG 14.
3. Participants introduced themselves. The list of participants is provided in Annex 1.

Overview of workshop and the draft Outlook document

4. The COBSEA Secretariat provided an overview of the workshop agenda and objectives. The objectives of the workshop were to guide finalization of the Outlook document based on national review and consultation, for consideration at COBSEA IGM 25; and to guide efforts to address priorities identified in the draft Outlook as well as COBSEA's Strategic Directions, including efforts by the COBSEA Secretariat to develop projects. Workshop agenda and description are provided in Annex 2 and 3.
5. An overview of the revised draft Outlook document was presented by the Secretariat. It was noted that comments and input provided at IGM 24 had been addressed in the draft document. The draft Outlook document has been restructured to accommodate feedback received as well as to enable a coherent and targeted presentation of information. The draft Outlook document is composed of three parts: introduction; situation analysis and COBSEA SDG Outlook and Roadmap. The COBSEA Secretariat apologized for the delay in circulating the draft Outlook, which was due to delayed delivery by the contracted consultant. Participants were encouraged to provide their inputs on the draft document and on the suggested actions.

Presentation of national SDG implementation planning and progress

6. Countries presented overviews of national SDG implementation process and progress. Action plans and frameworks developed as a direct response to the 2030 Agenda were presented, including integrating SDGs into planning frameworks, using a source-to-sea planning approach, and mainstreaming ecological conservation. Specific measures taken to achieve ocean-related SDG targets included e.g. marine protected areas and ecosystem restoration.
7. All COBSEA countries have addressed ocean-related SDGs in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at least once during the period 2016-2019. Information that has been included in the VNRs relate to sea-based pollution, habitat degradation, biodiversity protection as well as ocean acidification among others. Challenges on reporting in VNRs include lack of comprehensive monitoring and regular progress tracking. Limited coordination among sectors and institutions was further noted as a difficulty along with limited technical and management capacity.
8. Mentioned suggestions to address challenges and to strengthen SDG implementation included supporting a scientific baseline data gathering and strengthening scientific and technological research for marine environmental protection. Supporting the development of on-the-ground projects targeting fisheries, livelihood and waste management for example, was further noted. Improving environmental governance including strengthening inter-agency coordination as well as internal coordination was additionally called for, bearing in mind the different complementary and sometimes partially overlapping roles of ministries and departments in SDG implementation.

Recommendations on the further development and finalization of the draft Outlook document

9. Countries provided comments on the draft Outlook document. It was suggested that an executive summary and annexes should be added, including to accommodate more elaborated background information about the SDGs. Input provided in regards to recommended key actions included suggestions to further consolidate the list of actions, emphasizing a few distinct priority actions; to include timelines where relevant; and to ensure clear definition of the role of COBSEA countries and Secretariat. The need to emphasize capacity building was expressed. Comments provided in relation to specific recommended actions is summarized below.
10. *Indicator-based assessment:*

Countries noted the importance of indicator-based assessment for tracking progress and reporting on SDG delivery. It was recognized that mapping of currently used indicators and associated methods at national level can support identification of common indicators, linked with the EAS Action Plan, COBSEA Strategic Directions and COBSEA RAP MALI and relevant to the 2030 Agenda indicator framework. Further efforts would then be focused on these common indicators, including to build capacity on measuring, analysing and reporting, and where relevant to promote harmonization. This would support national efforts to report on SDG progress through VNRs as well as through submission of data to SDG indicator custodian agencies, and strengthen tracking of delivery through COBSEA. It was recommended that current technical and financial capacities and requirements for measuring indicators be considered in the mapping process as well as in the identification of common indicators. It was noted that a working group or expert group could be used to advance actions in relation to indicator-based assessment, and should be established with clearly defined role and functions.

11. *Cooperation:*

Countries recognized the need for COBSEA to strengthen cooperation with other international and regional organizations with the aim to promote alignment and harmonization of efforts as well as country engagement. Examples mentioned included other Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and strengthening south-south cooperation was mentioned. COBSEA should engage with other partners when and where relevant. It was noted that cooperation should be purpose-driven, and clearly defining purpose will drive better and more meaningful cooperation. The primary focus should be strengthening work through COBSEA on specific issues for which COBSEA has a mandate. Objectives of cooperation could for example be sharing of information and experiences as well as to strengthen capacity of COBSEA countries on SDG 14 implementation and reporting. Information sharing platform for cooperation was discussed. It was noted that the draft Outlook document should refrain from mentioning specific potential collaborators as it might imply exclusion of entities that are not mentioned.

12. *Governance and institutional arrangements:*

It was noted that, while governance and institutional arrangements are relevant and important topics to discuss, the draft Outlook document may not be the appropriate means to do so. Governance and institutional arrangements are not specific to COBSEA's role and work related to the SDGs, but are rather more overarching in nature. As such, the outcome of the discussion was that the report should focus on the following elements under Part 3. COBSEA SDG Outlook and Roadmap: indicator-based assessment; cooperation; and capacity. It was noted that discussions on utilizing the COBSEA Bureau in intersessional work between Intergovernmental Meetings as well as exploring whether analysis of the East Asia Seas action plan and its current institutional and working arrangements is warranted could be taken up at future Intergovernmental Meetings.

13. *Capacity:*

Participants stressed the importance of building capacity among COBSEA countries on SDG tracking and reporting, and more broadly on development and implementation of monitoring programmes. COBSEA provides a platform for knowledge sharing and transfer of best practices. It was stressed that capacity building through COBSEA should focus on delivering key actions identified in the Outlook document. It was suggested that the COBSEA Secretariat map SDG delivery support tools and organizations involved in providing support to countries in relation delivery of ocean-related SDGs. It was also suggested to document best practices and lessons learned on implementation of ocean-related SDGs and in particular SDG 14.

14. Noting the guidelines on the establishment and operation of COBSEA Regional Activity Centres (RAC) adopted at the 24th Intergovernmental Meeting, the potential use of RACs in addressing priorities identified in the draft Outlook was discussed. The COBSEA Secretariat was asked to identify specific issues and needs that potential future COBSEA RACs could focus on, for presentation to COBSEA countries as a basis for discussion. It was advised that this should draw on learning from other Regional Seas that have a long history of working through RACs, such as the Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP).

15. The opportunity to prepare Voluntary Commitments to be presented at UN Ocean Conference 2020 in June in Portugal was discussed. It was noted that a voluntary commitment submitted for

the previous UN Ocean Conference 2017 on development of COBSEA's Strategic Directions and revision of RAP MALI was successfully delivered. It was concluded that the COBSEA Secretariat will draft a Voluntary Commitment based on the scope and mandate of COBSEA and focusing on current priorities, and share this with COBSEA countries for review. COBSEA countries may wish to prepare and submit national Voluntary Commitments addressing priorities identified through COBSEA and, where relevant, referencing the East Asian Seas Action Plan, COBSEA Strategic Directions and RAP MALI. In this regard, countries were requested to provide information to the COBSEA Secretariat on Voluntary Commitments submitted. With this, the section on Voluntary Commitment would be removed from the draft Outlook document.

Pathway towards finalization of the draft Outlook document for consideration at COBSEA IGM 25

16. The COBSEA Secretariat presented a proposed timeline for finalization of the draft Outlook document. It was agreed that the COBSEA Secretariat will provide a revised version of the draft by the end of February 2020, based on discussions at the workshop and written comments submitted to the Secretariat by the end of 2019. Countries will have until 1 May 2020 to comment on the draft. The Secretariat will then prepare a final draft Outlook document, by 15 August 2020, as a working document for the 25th Intergovernmental Meeting.
17. It was noted that actions stemming from the draft Outlook document can only be pursued upon adoption of the Outlook document by the Intergovernmental Meeting. However, a number of identified follow-up activities can be pursued where a mandate already exists, such as in relation to marine litter monitoring, mapping of nationally used indicators and methods and promoting harmonized national monitoring programmes, as well as in relation to documenting best practices and lessons learned on SDG implementation.

Review of ongoing projects and new project ideas

18. The Secretariat provided a brief overview of current projects, noting that a detailed update had been provided at the 24th Intergovernmental Meeting. As such, only some updates were provided. A delegate suggested that the COBSEA Secretariat should provide countries regular project progress updates, specifically mentioning SEA Circular project and the need to engage COBSEA countries that are not direct target/recipient countries under the project, including to enhance sharing of experiences and best practice.
19. In line with the recommendation made at the 24th Intergovernmental Meeting to consult countries at an early stage regarding opportunities to develop additional COBSEA project activities, the COBSEA Secretariat presented new project ideas that are in line with COBSEA's mandate and respond directly to COBSEA's Strategic Directions, build on COBSEA's activities in the recent past, and that may be possible to advance through collaboration with UNEP and other partners. It was stressed that, as the workshop is not a decision-making forum, the purpose was simply to present ideas and exchange views on project development.

Land-based Marine Pollution

20. Establishing an East Asian Seas Nitrogen Hub:

Nitrogen fertilizer and other run-off in the East Asian Seas region are significant. A UNEA resolution on Sustainable Nitrogen Management (UNEP/EA.4/Res.14) identifies global priorities. An 'East Asian Seas Nitrogen Hub' could be established to support development of the policy framework in the region; enhance the science-policy interface including through assessment; and build capacity among governments and other stakeholders. A model for this exists in the South Asia Nitrogen Hub established through the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) 2019. The activity could be advanced in cooperation with the Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities (GPA) Coordination office, and drawing on the outputs of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project International Nitrogen Management Systems (INMS) as well as the UN Nitrogen Campaign, launched October 2019 and led by the Global Partnership on Nutrient Management.

It was noted by several countries that the issue of nutrients and nitrogen is important and that it is encouraging to see this development in COBSEA. It was further stated that the project idea aligns well with COBSEA's Strategic Directions and as such is within COBSEA's mandate. The Secretariat will pursue discussion with UNEP/GPA on possible pathways for developing the activity further.

21. Sea-based sources of marine litter: examining the role of aquaculture:

The East Asian Seas region relies heavily on aquaculture. While it is believed plastic leakage from the sector generates significant volumes of marine litter, the extent of the problem and its impacts on ecosystems and communities remain underexplored and unaddressed. A foundational study in pilot sites could shed light on the scale, sources, types and impacts of marine litter from aquaculture to raise awareness among key stakeholders, identify initial priority actions and catalyse targeted interventions to reduce and prevent leakage, and lay the groundwork for evidence-based action across the region. The project idea is in line with the COBSEA RAP MALI and responds to discussions at meetings of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter.

Delegates noted lack of such work in the region and expressed interest in the project. Cooperation and potential overlap with work of other entities was discussed. It was noted that the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) is highly relevant, but that this may be primarily focused on marine litter from capture fisheries (including through the Global Ghost Gear Initiative and the FAO-IMO collaborative initiative GloLitter), and does not principally address the marine environment. FAO has expressed interest in collaboration on this topic, including through past meetings of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter. It was suggested that COBSEA can be used as a platform for exchange and sharing of best practices in the field.

Marine and Coastal Planning and Management

22. Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning:

Past COBSEA projects and in particular 'Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone – Disaster Prevention and Sustainable Development' (2010-2013) provide a foundation for further activities in line with the Strategic Directions. This includes capacity building and supporting development

of a conducive policy environment for marine and coastal planning in the East Asian Seas region. Through collaboration with the Blue Solutions Initiative (involving UN Environment Programme, GIZ, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Grid-Arendal), regional Marine and Coastal Spatial Planning training aimed at government officials at senior technical level may be organized in 2020, based on the 'Blue Planning in Practice' course, adapted as necessary to the regional context. This may be followed by a workshop in 2021 aimed at policy makers.

One country mentioned coastal spatial planning training organized for countries in the region in 2019. It was noted that such experiences and information could be incorporated into the proposed activities.

23. *Data and analyses for coral reef resilience and systematic conservation planning:*

The East Asian Seas region has the largest coral reef area and highest coral reef species diversity in the world, and coral reefs are critically important to the region. COBSEA has in the past addressed coordination of coral reef monitoring and management in the region, and more recently implemented a pilot project on consideration of reef resilience in conservation/spatial planning. The International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and its Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) recognize Regional Seas as key institutional mechanisms for coordination of coral reef monitoring at regional level and for considering findings in a policy context.

Through collaboration with UN Environment Programme, activities in relation to coral reefs may encompass convening regional workshops on reef monitoring and networking (potentially in 2020 and 2021), further analysis of coral reef conservation priorities towards a climate resilient network of Marine Protected Areas, and as possible further demonstration projects at site level focused on integrating coral reef climate change vulnerability into conservation planning.

It was noted that the coral reef ecosystem is very important in the region and that it is threatened by climate change. Additional attention to this issue was welcomed and the COBSEA Secretariat was encouraged to assist countries in addressing it.

Summary and Closing of the Workshop

24. DENR representative Engr. Vizmindia Ososio, thanked participants for active engagement and constructive contributions, and welcomed participants back to the Philippines. On behalf of the COBSEA Secretariat, Mr. Jerker Tamelander summarized the main recommendations and follow-up arising from the meeting as well as the pathway towards finalization of the draft Outlook document. The meeting was closed at 16.35 on 12 December 2019.

Annexes

Annex 1 – Participant List

Annex 2 – Meeting Agenda

Annex 3 – Workshop Design and Guidance

Presentations from the meeting can be accessed on the COBSEA website at:

<https://www.unenvironment.org/cobsea/events/workshop/regional-workshop-cobsea-follow-and-review-ocean-related-sdgs>

ANNEX 1 - PARTICIPANT LIST

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ANNEX 2 - MEETING AGENDA

Time	Activity	Responsible Person/Institution
Tuesday, 10 December 2019		
All day	Arrival of participants	
Wednesday, 11 December 2019		
08:30 – 09:00	Registration	Participants
09:00 – 09:15	Workshop opening and welcome remarks	COBSEA Coordinator DENR Representative
09:15 – 09:30	Participants introduction	Participants
09:30 – 09:45	Workshop overview: Workshop objectives and agenda	COBSEA Secretariat
09:45 – 10:15	Overview of the COBSEA SDG Implementation Outlook: Background, objectives, and contents	COBSEA Secretariat
10:15 – 10:45	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
10:45 – 12:00	Presentation of findings from national review and consultation on the draft Outlook document	Country Representatives (in alphabetical order)
12:00 – 13:30	<i>Lunch Break</i>	
13:30 – 15:30	Continuation: Presentation of findings from national review and consultation on the draft Outlook document	Country Representatives
15:30 – 15:45	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
15:45 – 17:15	Recommendations on the further development and finalization of the Outlook document	Discussion
18:00 – 21:00	Dinner Reception	
Thursday, 12 December 2019		
09:00 – 09:30	Pathway towards finalization of the Outlook document for consideration at COBSEA IGM 25	COBSEA Coordinator
09:30 – 10:30	Planned follow-up on recommendations arising from the Outlook document	COBSEA Secretariat
10:30 – 11:00	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
11:00 – 12:00	Strengthening implementation: Review of project pipeline; presentation, discussion and prioritization of concepts	COBSEA Secretariat
12:00 – 13:30	<i>Lunch</i>	
13:30 – 15:30	Continuation: Strengthening implementation	
15:30 – 15:45	<i>Coffee Break</i>	
15:45 – 16:00	Summary and wrap-up	COBSEA Coordinator
16:00 – 16:30	Workshop closing and remarks	COBSEA Coordinator DENR Representative
Friday, 13 December 2019		
Morning	Departure of participants	

ANNEX 3 - WORKSHOP DESIGN AND GUIDANCE

A. BACKGROUND

At the 24th COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM) in June 2019 at Bali, Indonesia, the Secretariat presented progress made on the development of an Outlook on COBSEA follow-up and review of ocean-related Sustainable Development Goals.

Participating countries agreed on steps towards further development and finalization of the outlook document including preparation of a revised draft by the Secretariat as basis for national review and consultation, and a regional workshop scheduled in the last quarter of 2019. The final draft will be considered at the 25th COBSEA IGM.

Participating countries also requested the Secretariat to continue developing COBSEA's project pipeline, in consultation with National Focal Points.

B. WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the workshop are:

- To guide finalization of the Outlook document based on national review and consultation, for consideration at COBSEA IGM 25.
- To guide efforts to address priorities identified in the Outlook as well as COBSEA's Strategic Directions, including efforts by the COBSEA secretariat to develop projects

C. WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Intended workshop participants include representatives from 9 COBSEA countries, such as The COBSEA National Focal Point, technical officer/staff of National Focal Point and relevant staff of national agency responsible for SDG implementation and monitoring.

Representatives from other regional organizations (e.g. ASEAN Secretariat/AWGCME, ACB, PEMSEA, NOWPAP, IOC-WESTPAC) will be invited to participate as observers.

Representatives from Philippines' DENR and other concerned national agencies as well as from UNEP and COBSEA Secretariat will also participate in the workshop.

D. WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

The workshop is divided into two parts. First is presentation and discussion on the draft outlook document, and second is presentation and discussion on the development project pipeline in support to the implementation of the COBSEA Strategic Directions and recommendations from the SDG outlook document and discussions.

The COBSEA countries will present the results and findings of national reviews and consultations on the draft updated outlook document, which will be shared to countries by the Secretariat a month prior to the workshop. During this one month period, the countries will have to organize their respective national reviews and consultations, and will have to submit their initial results and findings to the Secretariat to summarize and synthesize the findings. After the country presentation, the COBSEA Consultant will present the consolidated findings and recommendations including the pathway towards finalization of the outlook document, and follow up actions on the recommendations arising from the outlook document, for consideration by the COBSEA IGM. A presentation guideline will be shared to the countries for guidance.

The second part of the workshop is the review of project pipeline where the COBSEA Secretariat will present and discuss draft project concepts for consideration by the countries, and agree on the prioritization of project concepts for further development by the Secretariat. In consultation with countries, the COBSEA Secretariat will identify and explore potential donor and funding agencies to support the prioritized concept proposals.

E. PRESENTATION GUIDELINES

COBSEA participating countries will be asked to prepare a short presentation on the progress of implementation of ocean-related SDGs at the national level. Participating countries will designate a representative to do the presentation, which will cover the following:

1. National SDG implementation planning process and status, with particular attention to ocean-related SDGs
 - Ocean-related SDGs implemented
 - Process and progress of SDG implementation planning and implementation including legal and institutional mechanisms, policies and processes, etc.
 - Key challenges and measures to address and strengthen SDG implementation
 - Best practices and lessons learned in SDG implementation

2. Comments arising from review of the draft COBSEA SDG implementation outlook including recommendations towards its finalization
 - Structure, substance and contents of outlook document
 - Recommendations arising from the outlook document such as establishing proper indicator-based assessment, etc
 - Recommendations towards finalization of outlook document
 - Follow up actions and way forward

In the interest of time, presentations are expected to last no longer than 15 minutes, to allow some time for questions and answers.