



Proceedings of the Thirty Fifth East Asian Seas Executive Council Meeting

31 March 2026
PEMSEA Resource Facility, Quezon City,
Philippines

Proceedings of the 35th PEMSEA Executive Committee Meeting

PEMSEA Resource Facility, Quezon City, Philippines

31 March 2026 | 9:00 - 12:00 GMT+8

Introduction

- I. The East Asian Seas (EAS) Executive Committee convened its 35th Executive Committee Meeting on 31 March 2026 in the conference room of PEMSEA Resource Facility, Quezon City. The meeting was attended by EAS Partnership Council Chair Attorney Jonas Leones; Intergovernmental Session Chair Mr. Le Dai Thang; Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair Dr. Xinwei Yu; Technical Session Chair Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon; and Technical Session Co-Chair Dr. Wakita Kazumi. Representatives from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines and the China PEMSEA Center, served as observers. The PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF), led by Executive Director (ED) Ms. Aimee T. Gonzales, served as Secretariat to the meeting.
- II. Supporting documents may be found in the Annexes:
 - A. Annex 1 - Agenda
 - B. Annex 2 - Presentation, meeting documents, and photos
 - C. Annex 3 - List of participants

1. Opening of the 35th Expanded Executive Committee Meeting and Approval of the Agenda (EC/35/DOC/01b)

- 1.1. USec. Jonas Leones, Chair of the EAS Partnership Council, formally opened the 35th Executive Committee Meeting. He acknowledged the presence of the Executive Committee, namely: Intergovernmental Session Chair, Mr. Le Dai Thang; the Technical Session Chair, Dr. Suk-jae Kwon; the Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair, Dr. Yu Xinwei and the Technical Session Co-Chair Dr. Kazumi Wakita; PRF Executive Director, Ms. Aimee Gonzales and Management Committee; and Observer from the China PEMSEA Center, Mr. Zhao Linlin.
- 1.2. The Chair underscored that the meeting convenes at a time of great momentum for PEMSEA, with the decisions of the day expected to directly shape preparations for the 18th EAS Partnership Council. He provided an overview of the agenda, highlighting key items for discussion, including the recruitment of the PRF Executive Director, the revised 18th EAS PC Meeting agenda, the draft 2025 PEMSEA audited financial statements, 2025 PEMSEA accomplishment report, the 2026–2027 workplan and budget, strategic considerations for re-engaging Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei, as well as items on youth engagement, marine protected areas baseline report for the EAS region, and updates on the organizational capacity development and business development and resource mobilization to complement the effective implementation of the recently approved PEMSEA strategic programme framework, SDS-SEA IP 2023-2030 .

- 1.3. The Chair emphasized that these initiatives collectively aim to strengthen PEMSEA's institutional foundation, science-based action, partnerships, and sustainable financing, while reinforcing its long-term relevance and regional impact. The Chair encouraged active participation and constructive collaboration among members to ensure clear and actionable outcomes from the meeting.
- 1.4. Following the opening remarks and a brief group photo session, Ms. Abi Cruzada, PRF Secretariat Coordinator, presented the agenda for the Executive Committee Meeting for the Executive Committee members' comments and subsequent adoption.
- 1.5. **Decision:** The agenda was adopted.

2. **Approval of Schedule for PRF ED Selection and Recruitment Panel (EC/35/DOC/02)**

- 2.1. Ms. Cruzada presented the proposed timeline for the selection of the PRF Executive Director.
- 2.2. The call for applications was circulated after approval during the 17th EAS PC Meeting through PEMSEA's social media channels and website, and published in *The Economist*, with the application period closing on 31 March 2026. The Secretariat will undertake shortlisting from 6 to 25 April 2026, with shortlisted candidates to be submitted to the Selection Committee for review and approval from 1 to 15 May 2026.
- 2.3. Virtual interviews are scheduled from 18 May to 12 June 2026, with results to be finalized by 26 June 2026. The outcome of the selection process will be presented at the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting on 22 July 2026, and onboarding of the selected candidate is tentatively planned between August and December 2026.
- 2.4. **Discussion:**
- 2.5. The Chair inquired about the Selection Committee members' availability on the proposed period for interviewing candidates, to which members confirmed their availability. The Chair then instructed the Secretariat to provide proposed dates to the members within the interview period once candidates are shortlisted.
- 2.6. The Chair emphasized the need to provide the Selection Committee with the full information of shortlisted candidates prior to the interview schedule, to which the Secretariat Coordinator confirmed that the period from May 1-15 will be when the CVs of shortlisted candidates will be provided.

2.7. Further to this, Usec. Leones asked whether a criteria was already developed for the selection. Ms. Gonzales clarified that the criteria for selection will be developed in line with the published TOR during the shortlisting period, and the proposed criteria will be submitted to the Selection Committee together with the applicants' CVs.

2.8. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the updated schedule for the selection of the PRF Executive Director, and posed no objections to the proposed interview period by the Selection Committee. The Chair inquired about the availability of Selection Committee members on the proposed dates, and members confirmed their availability. It was clarified that candidate profiles and CVs will be provided prior to the interviews, that interview questions and guidelines will be made available, and that the selection criteria will be based on the Terms of Reference. The EC noted that the selected Executive Director's formal approval will be brought before the EAS Partnership Council.

2.9. **Recommendations:**

- The Council Chair recommended the inclusion of the Co-Chairs as observers to the interviews of the Selection Committee.
- The Council Chair requested that the CVs of shortlisted candidates and draft criteria for selection be submitted by the Secretariat for review prior to the interview schedule in May.

2.10. **Decision:** The EC approved the revised schedule, and instructed the PRF to conduct the necessary administrative processes for the shortlisting of candidates.

3. Approval of Revised 18th East Asian Seas (EAS) Partnership Council (PC) Meeting Agenda (EC/35/DOC/03)

3.1. Ms. Cruzada presented the current status of preparations for the 18th EAS PC Meeting and the revised agenda and dates of the meeting as shown in EC/35/DOC/03.

3.2. The 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting will be hosted by Singapore and will be jointly organized by the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment (MSE), Ministry of National Development (MND), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and the PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF).

3.3. The meeting was shortened from 21–23 July to 22–23 July 2026 (two days instead of three), with July 21 designated as arrival day and July 24 as departure. This was at Singapore's request and to avoid conflicts with ASEAN-related meetings (specifically the ASOEN Annual Meeting and COBSEA Governance Meetings).

3.4. Currently, the Secretariat and Singapore organizing Committee are in the process of conducting ocular inspections for shortlisted hotels, with the expectation that a final venue

will be confirmed by the last week of April 2026. Following this, the Secretariat will issue formal invitation letters to registered participants of the meeting.

- 3.5. The 18th EAS PC Meeting Agenda, which was initially approved during the 34th Expanded Executive Committee (see EC/34/DOC/06 [here](#)), has been updated to include important updates on several PEMSEA initiatives discussed during previous meetings. Key changes included the following:
- Inclusion of welcome remarks from the Government of Singapore during the opening of the meeting;
 - Addition of Presentation of 2026-2027 workplans of the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers and PEMSEA Network of Local Governments under Other business of the Council Session
 - Addition of Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report (Agenda 9.0) and PEMSEA Young Leaders' Program (Agenda 10.0) in the Technical Session
 - Addition of Business Development and Resource Mobilization Report, and OCA/Leadership & Succession Planning — added under the Sustainability Plan item (Agenda 14.0) and Re-engagement with Thailand, Malaysia as formal country partners (noted as TBC under Agenda 14.0) under the Intergovernmental Session

3.6. Discussion:

- 3.7. On the meeting duration, Mr. Le raised the question of why the meeting was compressed to two days rather than three. Ms. Gonzales clarified that the two-day format was recommended by Singapore as the host, adding that the third day had originally been intended for a field visit. Additionally, in light of recent circumstances due to the global oil crisis, reducing the number of days and travel time of participants and restructuring the meeting proper as a two-day session was deemed more prudent.
- 3.8. Further to this, Mr. Le made a follow up question on whether the meeting would be held in hybrid format, considering that many NCPs participate online instead of onsite. On the meeting modality, Ms. Gonzales noted that an onsite format is preferred and participants will be encouraged to attend in person, online participation will also be an option. She acknowledged, however, that given the ongoing geopolitical crisis affecting certain member countries, some participants, particularly those coming from outside the region may only be able to join online.
- 3.9. On NCP engagement, Dr. Wakita raised the importance of ensuring NCPs and the PNLC Secretariat are meaningfully invited and have clear incentives to participate — whether onsite or online — and suggested the need to think more strategically about strengthening NCP collaboration and attendance, not only for this meeting but going forward.

- 3.10. Ms. Gonzales responded that the Secretariat actively engages NCPs between meetings, including through the Blue Carbon TWG and NCP-organized activities that PRF supports through attendance or collaborative programs. She noted that the Deputy Head of Partnerships Head can also assist in this regard. For partner networks, only the PNLG and PNLC Secretariats are invited; PNLC had just concluded its General Assembly in Manila.
- 3.11. The Council Chair requested the Secretariat to note all comments and requested that notice be provided to the EC should there be any further changes on the meeting dates.
- 3.12. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the revised agenda and expressed appreciation to the Government of Singapore through the Ministry of Sustainability and Environment for hosting the 18th EAS PC Meeting. Concerns were raised regarding the compressed meeting dates from three days to two days. It was clarified that the two-day meeting proper was recommended by Singapore, with the third day originally intended for a field visit. The meeting will be conducted in a hybrid format, with provisions for both onsite and online participation. The EC acknowledged ongoing challenges in encouraging physical attendance of National Contact Points (NCPs), noting that global uncertainties and resource constraints make full onsite participation difficult. Members noted the importance of keeping NCPs actively engaged between meetings, including through mechanisms such as the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group, PEMSEA projects and the PNLG and PNLC networks.
- 3.13. **Recommendations:**
- The Technical Session Co-Chair encouraged PRF to continue working with NCPs between meetings to sustain active engagement and increase attendance at governance meetings and highlighted the importance of considering how the partnership networks — including PNLG and PNLC — can be more meaningfully drawn into governance meetings to increase collaboration and relevance.
 - The Council Chair requested that final meeting arrangements, including confirmation of onsite and online session modalities, will be shared with EC members once confirmed with Singapore.
- 3.14. **Decision:** The 18th EAS PC Agenda is approved. Final arrangements will be shared with EC members once confirmed.

4. Audited Financial Statement 2025 and Audit Committee Meeting (EC/35/DOC/04)

- 4.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the results of the PEMSEA Audit Committee Meeting, conducted on 30 March 2026 and the Audited Financial Statements (AFS), with a clarification that figures presented are still a draft and will be updated to include inputs

made during the meeting. The final AFS will be submitted to the EC for approval via a referendum before 15 April 2026.

- 4.2. The Committee was reconstituted with a new Chair and membership for the 2025–2027 term: EAS PC Chair Jonas Leones as Chair, supported by two international experts — one in strategic planning and development, and one in accounting and finance. A new external auditor, Punongbayan & Araullo, was also appointed for 2025–2027. The EC was requested to note the results of the Audit Committee Meeting and the 2025 Audited Financial Statements (AFS).
- 4.3. The PRF reported a clean audit, with no findings of fraud and full compliance with applicable regulations. The auditors issued a clean unmodified opinion with minor recommendations to improve accounting systems.
- 4.4. Ms. Gonzales then requested Ms. Mary Ann dela Peña, Financial Specialist of PRF, to discuss the financial highlights as of 31 December 2025.
- 4.5. On financial performance, total receipts for 2025 increased by 13%, from USD 3.67 million (2024) to USD 4.16 million (2025). The increase was driven primarily by multilateral and other grants, which grew by 84% from USD 1.57 million to USD 2.88 million. Government contributions and grants, meanwhile, decreased from USD 1.81 million to USD 1.00 million. PEMSEA Services contributed USD 270,942.
- 4.6. Total expenses increased from USD 3.56 million to USD 4.12 million, with direct project expenses comprising the largest share (USD 3.52 million, or approximately 85% of total expenses), reflecting a 17% increase over 2024. The excess of receipts over expenses stood at USD 38,617, down from USD 111,403 in 2024, representing net savings for the year.
- 4.7. The increase was primarily attributed to higher contributions from multilateral and other grants, which remained the largest source of funding, alongside government contributions. PEMSEA services and interest income contributed a smaller share. Total comprehensive income, after accounting for remeasurement gains/losses on retirement benefit obligations and fair value adjustments, was USD 24,148.
- 4.8. On the balance sheet, total assets grew by 46% from USD 3.92 million to USD 5.71 million, driven largely by a 50% increase in cash (USD 5.54 million from USD 3.70 million) and a significant increase in receivables. Total liabilities also increased correspondingly, largely due to a 86% growth in deferred grants (USD 3.26 million from USD 1.76 million), reflecting new project funding received. Total equity stood at USD 1.67 million, slightly higher than the previous year, despite movements in reserves, including fair value adjustments.
- 4.9. As a result, the excess of receipts over expenses decreased to USD 38,617 in 2025, compared to USD 111,403 in 2024. The higher surplus in 2024 was attributed to one-

time contributions and event-related receipts, including those associated with the East Asian Seas Congress 2024.

- 4.10. Overall financial performance remains stable, with increased revenues supporting expanded program delivery, while emphasizing the importance of continued monitoring of expenditures and fund utilization.
- 4.11. Key recommendations from the auditors were to:
- Ensure the SAP Business accounting system is fully operationalized in 2026 and its efficiency monitored;
 - Review the excess of receipts over expenses to determine whether it constitutes genuine savings, unspent funds, or carry-over from prior-year projects; and
 - Include financial issues in PEMSEA's risk register, with explicit linkages to technical deliverables.
- 4.12. Ms. Gonzales informed the Committee that the Secretariat will circulate the detailed financial table, noting that the document was only received the previous day. A draft of the Audit Committee Meeting proceedings and the final AFS will be submitted to the Executive Committee by 13 April with the note that approval must be provided no later than 14 April, as the audited financial statements need to be submitted to the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) within the prescribed deadline (15 April 2026), noting that this period coincides with the peak audit season. Despite time constraints, the team is making every effort to ensure full compliance.
- 4.13. Discussion:**
- 4.14. The Council Chair observed that the results demonstrate that PRF's projects and programs are being efficiently implemented and that savings have been generated, characterizing the overall outcome as a clean audit with no fraud.
- 4.15. The Secretariat acknowledged that the full proceedings of the Audit Committee Meeting had not been circulated in advance, as the meeting had only taken place the preceding day, and apologized for the short lead time. Members were advised that additional clarifications could be requested directly from the Secretariat.
- 4.16. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the Audited Financial Statement (AFS) for 2025, which reflects a clean audit with no findings of fraud and demonstrates that projects are being efficiently implemented, with savings generated. The Chair noted this as a positive result. It was raised that some members of the Executive Committee — particularly the Intergovernmental Session Chair and Technical Session Chair — do not have financial expertise and may not be in a position to formally approve the AFS.

4.17. **Recommendations:**

- The Intergovernmental Session Chair recommended that the action for this agenda item be reframed from "approval by the EC" to "submission to the EC," in recognition of the members' varying financial expertise.
- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended that the AFS be shared with Country Partners for their reference, noting that member governments such as Japan would have an interest in reviewing the figures.

4.18. **Decision:** The EC noted and approved the 2025 Audited Financial Statements and the results of the 15th Audit Committee Meeting. The following timeline was agreed for post-meeting actions:

- PRF to send 15th AC Proceedings and Punongbayan & Araullo to submit the 2025 AFS — by April 9, 2026
- AC members to send feedback and comments on the proceedings and final 2025 AFS — by April 12, 2026
- PRF to send final proceedings and AC-endorsed report to EC — by April 13, 2026
- PRF to submit the 2025 AFS to the Bureau of Internal Revenue and publish on pemsea.org — by April 15, 2026

5. **2025 Accomplishment Report (EC/35/DOC/05)**

- 5.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the 2025 Accomplishment Report, framing it as Year 3 of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2027 and noting that 2025 was a strong year for PRF. Key highlights of the presentation were as follows.
- 5.2. On financial and operational sustainability, PRF exceeded its target of securing USD 3–4 million annually, with actual receipts of USD 4.16 million in 2025. Projected receipts for 2026 are estimated at USD 6.7 million. Revenue sources remain consistent, with country partner contributions, execution and management fees for major regional projects, technical advisory and fund management services, and capacity development and training partnerships in the mix.
- 5.3. Country Partner contributions in 2025 were received as committed, while 2026 figures remain indicative and subject to change, though unlikely to fall below USD 5 million. The Philippines' in-kind contribution (building security and utilities) was revalued to approximately USD 324,000.00 based on an updated valuation, including rental equivalence and increased operational costs.
- 5.4. Execution and management fees are closely tied to project implementation, and projections for 2026 are expected to remain strong, contingent on full project delivery.

- 5.5. On programmatic accomplishments, Key achievements on the implementation of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2027 included:
- Assessment of mid-term implementation progress and identification of gaps;
 - Development of the Status, Trends, and Futures Report, outlining emerging challenges and opportunities in ocean and coastal governance; and
 - Extension and refinement of the Implementation Plan to 2030, adopting a balanced scorecard framework for strategic alignment and accountability.
- 5.6. On project accomplishments, she provided a high-level overview, noting that:
- For the Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) Project, Memoranda of Agreement have been signed in five out of six participating countries, and six out of seven regional consultations have been completed;
 - Regional tools, including templates on the Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystem Nexus, have been developed, with governance systems taking shape;
 - Under the Marine Plastics Program, baseline monitoring and analysis were conducted across selected sites, including in the Philippines and Timor-Leste, alongside ongoing implementation of pilot projects;
 - The Marine Environmental Protection Program continued into its second year, with strong engagement from civil society, particularly in knowledge, attitudes, and perception surveys; and
 - Through collaboration with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, efforts are underway to strengthen Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) through integrated management approaches, including marine spatial planning and ecosystem-based fisheries management. She noted that consultations have been conducted, with further progress expected upon finalization of pending approvals.
- 5.7. On strategy and governance, PRF retained its long-term vision of Healthy Oceans, People and Economies, with four pillars — Healthy Ocean, Healthy People, Healthy Economies, and Effective and Transformative Governance — now mapped against a balanced scorecard with four external-facing perspectives (stakeholder engagement, programs and processes, learning and growth, and financial sustainability) and seven strategic objectives to guide monitoring and evaluation.
- 5.8. Inclusive stakeholder engagement was heavily emphasized in the revision of the SDS-SEA IP, noting the need to capture demographic data and ensure broader participation, particularly among youth and emerging leaders. She underscored that strengthening leadership and attracting the next generation of coastal and ocean practitioners remains a priority.

- 5.9. Other key accomplishments included:
- Establishment of the Blue Carbon Working Group which guided the step wise implementation of PEMSEA’s Blue Carbon Program;
 - Expansion of partnership networks, including establishing a Regional Collaborative Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) at the 10th Our Ocean Conference;
 - Continued progress in IRBM project implementation across countries, including signing of MOAs with Vietnam and Indonesia;
 - Strengthened capacity development initiatives, particularly in project oversight for GEF-funded activities;
 - Renewal of partnerships, including renewed Memoranda of Understanding for MOF/PEMSEA ODA Project on Reducing Marine Plastics with Timor Leste;
 - Successful convening of the PNLG Forum in Jakarta, Indonesia in September, with expanded participation from other local government networks such as RARE’s Coastal 500 and UNEP-GEF South China Sea local government partners;
 - Organization of a Mayors’ Conference on Marine Plastics in Manila, Philippines in October, resulting in local commitments to reduce plastic pollution;
 - Engagement in regional and youth-led initiatives on marine stewardship through the Blue Wave Conference in Shenzhen, China; and
 - Formalization of partnerships with organizations such as Conservation International where PEMSEA serves as Executing Agency Support partner of the PRICELESS project.

5.10. Looking ahead, the Executive Director identified the following priorities for 2026: leadership transition, financial mobilization, policy integration, scaling of project solutions, and network expansion — including the potential re-engagement of Malaysia and Thailand as formal PEMSEA partners.

5.11. Discussion:

5.12. Dr. Wakita congratulated PRF on the accomplishments, with particular interest in the MPA baseline report. The Technical Session Co-Chair raised a practical challenge encountered in engaging the Japanese government's feedback to the report: the difficulty in clearly explaining the distinctions between PEMSEA's work, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity's mandate, and the Convention on Biological Diversity framework.

5.13. Dr. Wakita noted that MPAs in Japan fall under the Ministry of Environment, while PEMSEA engagement is anchored with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport (MLIT) — meaning that for MLIT to support PEMSEA's work, it must first secure buy-in from the Ministry of Environment, which has found it difficult to navigate the delineation between these overlapping initiatives.

5.14. The Technical Session Co-Chair underscored the importance of continued support from the PRF Secretariat in developing concise briefing materials for Country Partners that clearly articulate PEMSEA’s mandate, unique role, and comparative advantage vis-à-vis

other regional organizations. Such materials are considered instrumental in facilitating informed intergovernmental consultations within national ministries and strengthening institutional understanding and engagement.

- 5.15. The Council Chair further noted that, in several instances, national authorities are already undertaking coordinated efforts across relevant government agencies to align coastal resource management policies. In this regard, PEMSEA's work plays a strategic role in advancing regional coherence and integration, complementing national initiatives and supporting a more harmonized approach to coastal and marine governance across participating countries.
- 5.16. Ms. Gonzales acknowledged the challenge and noted that this can be further explained in the session on the MPA report later in the agenda. She affirmed that PEMSEA's approach has always been to encourage a 'whole-of-government' engagement, following from its core focus on integrated coastal management and multi-stakeholder participation.
- 5.17. While inter-ministerial coordination is challenging and takes time, the PRF Executive Director noted that the more consistently this integration is pursued, the better the results in terms of explaining each organization's role, minimizing inefficiencies, and avoiding duplication. She cited PEMSEA's MPA collaboration with other regional networks as an example of this approach in practice, rooted in the shared desire to contribute to the 30x30 targets through a genuinely integrated framework. The Council Chair affirmed that PEMSEA does not want to work in silos.
- 5.18. The Intergovernmental Session Chair commended the Executive Director and the PRF Secretariat for their accomplishments — particularly for mobilizing financial resources and ensuring the sustainability of PRF amid a challenging global environment marked by geopolitical tensions, ongoing uncertainties, and reduced funding flows to certain UN organizations and programmes.
- 5.19. Mr. Le also noted that the BBNJ Agreement has now been signed by many EAS countries, including Vietnam, and called for greater attention to and promotion of BBNJ implementation activities in the East Asian Seas region in the coming period. He further flagged that while Agenda Item 7 references re-engagement with Brunei alongside Malaysia and Thailand, the 2025 Accomplishment Report only mentions Malaysia and Thailand — and requested that Brunei be added to the report for consistency.
- 5.20. The Technical Session Chair (Dr. Xinwei) affirmed the value of PEMSEA as a unique partnership network that brings together governments, development institutions, organizations, and universities, and emphasized the importance of PEMSEA's continued visibility on international platforms.

- 5.21. On pipeline projects, the Executive Director noted ongoing efforts to develop new project proposals, including potential engagement with the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Fund and Conservation International, as well as the Blue Solutions Project with IMO and the German government on shipping decarbonization in ASEAN countries (with Japan, Korea, and China participating), for which the grant agreement is under preparation.
- 5.22. **Conclusion:** The EC noted with appreciation the key accomplishments of the PEMSEA Resource Facility vis-à-vis the approved objectives of the 2025–2026 PRF Workplan. Members commended the Secretariat for mobilizing financial resources and ensuring PRF's sustainability amid global uncertainties, ongoing geopolitical tensions, and reduced funding for certain UN organizations. The EC also noted the significance of the BBNJ Agreement, which has been signed by many countries and the need to promote its implementation in the region.
- 5.23. **Recommendations:**
- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended that PRF prepare briefing materials — such as a quick reference document — to help Country Partners explain PEMSEA's unique role relative to other regional organizations with overlapping mandates, and to facilitate intergovernmental consultations within their respective governments in relation to requests for data related to SDS-SEA Implementation progress reporting, development of regional reports (e.g., MPA Report), among others.
 - The Council Chair encouraged PRF to promote a 'whole-of-government approach' in working with Country Partners, consistent with PEMSEA's ICM multistakeholder engagement framework.
 - The Intergovernmental Session Chair recommended that Brunei should be added in reference to re-engagement efforts alongside Malaysia and Thailand.
- 5.24. **Decision:** The EC endorsed the 2025 Accomplishment Report.

6. 2026-2027 PRF Workplan and Budget (EC/35/DOC/06)

- 6.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the 2026–2027 Work Plan and Budget, noting that PRF has adopted the objectives with the balanced scorecard approach introduced by the updated SDS-SEA IP 2023-2030, and expanded its strategic framework from three to four objectives. The four perspectives — stakeholder engagement, programs and processes, learning and growth, and financial sustainability — now guide the organization's planning and reporting, with seven strategic objectives nested under these perspectives. She noted that an accessible annual report summarizing accomplishments is also being prepared alongside the formal work plan.

- 6.2. Under stakeholder engagement, PEMSEA targets the establishment of ten catalytic partnerships and collaborations contributing to improved governance, enhanced investments, and on-the-ground impacts. Ms. Gonzales expressed confidence that this target is achievable collectively with ongoing projects, Country Partners, and the PRF's initiatives. Efforts to empower stakeholders through gender-responsive capacity development programs and the PEMSEA Youth Program are ongoing, with quantification of results still being refined.
- 6.3. Under programs and processes, key deliverables include:
- Development of seven State of the River Basin reports in the region;
 - Initiation of subregional pilot Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) projects in six countries;
 - Implementation of innovative solutions on marine plastics in selected cities in the Philippines;
 - Testing of blue carbon accounting methodologies in three sites across three countries;
 - Initiation of governance and management arrangements to support regional action programs, including those addressing abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear.
- 6.4. Under learning and growth, planned capacity-building initiatives, include:
- Organizational Capacity Assessment and development of corresponding plans and tools for the PEMSEA Resource Facility, with pilot implementation in the Philippines and potentially one additional country;
 - Development, testing, and refinement of IRBM training manuals and training-of-trainers programs;
 - Preparation of guides and templates for improved governance and management of river basins and coastal and marine areas, to be tested in seven river basins;
 - Development of toolkits on water-food-energy-ecosystem nexus approaches;
 - Development and testing of integrated ICM and MSP training modules for marine protected areas in three countries;
 - Enhancement of knowledge-sharing platforms, including the SEA Knowledge Bank and other regional platforms.
- 6.5. Under financial sustainability, Ms. Gonzales highlighted targets including:
- Development and implementation of a business development strategy and resource mobilization plan;
 - Establishment of a pipeline of ten projects; and
 - Securing approximately USD 4 million annually from various funding sources.
- 6.6. Ms. Gonzales explained that the proposed budget has been allocated in accordance with the strategic objectives, with detailed activity and budget breakdowns provided in Annex A of EC/35/DOC/06. Implementation progress will be monitored and reported semi-annually, supported by standardized reporting templates and guidance for Country Partners.

- 6.7. The Work Plan will be operationalized through key functional areas — policy development and management, coordination, project execution and technical services, strategic partnerships and resource mobilization, and organizational support functions including monitoring and evaluation, human resources, and finance. PRF staff are currently developing their individual Performance Implementation Plans as part of an ongoing institutional transition process.
- 6.8. Ms. Gonzales noted that the workplan will be operationalized through key functional areas, including policy development and management, coordination, project execution and technical services, strategic partnerships and resource mobilization, as well as organizational support functions such as monitoring and evaluation, human resources, and finance. She added that PRF staff are currently developing their respective Performance Implementation Plans as part of an ongoing transition process.
- 6.9. In terms of financial projections, the indicative budget requirements are approximately USD 6.7 million for 2026 and USD 4.4 million for 2027. The projected decrease in 2027 reflects the completion of some ongoing projects, underscoring the need to secure additional funding to sustain operations.

6.10. Discussion:

- 6.11. The IG Session Chair (Mr. Le) noted that despite re-engagement with Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei being identified as a next step in the 2025 Accomplishment Report, there was no corresponding inclusion of this activity in the 2026–2027 Work Plan and Budget.
- 6.12. Ms. Gonzales clarified that the re-engagement activities were deliberately not included in the Work Plan at this stage, as the Secretariat needed to first seek EC approval before proceeding — and that this would be addressed under the dedicated agenda item (Item 7).
- 6.13. Dr. Wakita offered advice to the Secretariat on the 2027 budget reduction, noting that a decrease is not always negative. The Technical Session Co-Chair encouraged PRF to continue closely identifying and responding to the demands and needs of Country Partners, so that PRF's services and project development remain grounded in what countries actually need. Ms. Gonzales affirmed that this has always been the approach and committed to further strengthening this demand-driven orientation.
- 6.14. Dr. Xinwei Yu expressed agreement with the Work Plan and echoed the importance of stakeholder consultation in every PEMSEA activity. The Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair affirmed PEMSEA's important and unique role as a partnership organization in global ocean governance, and encouraged greater emphasis on promoting this role across international mechanisms and conferences.

- 6.15. Dr. Yu called for more active engagement of governments and organizations — particularly Country Partners and non-country partners — in PEMSEA activities, noting that PEMSEA's current work through projects, PNLG, and PNLC already demonstrates this partnership model in practice, but that PEMSEA needs to promote itself more actively in international fora.
- 6.16. The Chair asked the Executive Director about projects currently in the pipeline for approval. Ms. Gonzales noted that PRF is working to get several projects off the ground, including two under GEF-9: one with DENR Philippines to access the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework Fund, and another with Conservation International.
- 6.17. The PRF Executive Director also noted the Blue Solutions Project with IMO on shipping decarbonization in the ASEAN region — the grant agreement is currently with the IMO Secretary-General and a subgrant for PEMSEA to manage the project in the region is being prepared. The Council Chair noted that for pipeline projects, the Secretariat should provide relevant information to the Partnership Council and work to secure Country Partner support to facilitate approval.
- 6.18. **Conclusion:** The EC noted with appreciation the objectives and activities outlined in the 2026–2027 PRF Workplan and Budget. It was noted that re-engagement activities with Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei were not yet reflected in the workplan, as PRF had deferred their inclusion pending EC approval of the strategic re-engagement framework under a separate agenda item. The EC underscored the importance of stakeholder consultation in all PEMSEA activities and highlighted PEMSEA's value as a partnership organization in global ocean governance. The EC acknowledged PRF's ongoing efforts to develop pipeline projects, including two GEF-9 proposals — one with DENR Philippines and the Kunming-Montreal GBF fund, and another with Conservation International — as well as a Blue Solutions project with IMO on decarbonization of ships. Members were encouraged to support PRF in securing country endorsements for pipeline project proposals.
- 6.19. **Recommendations:**
- The Intergovernmental Session Chair reiterated his request that re-engagement activities with Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei should be incorporated into the 2026–2027 workplan, following EC endorsement of the relevant strategic agenda item, as it was identified as a next step for PEMSEA in the 2025 accomplishment report.
 - The Council Chair advised PRF to provide the EC and Country Partners with information on pipeline projects to secure their support and facilitate approval.
 - The Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair recommended that PRF continue strengthening its engagement with partners through PNLG, PNLC, and project-based activities, and more actively promote PEMSEA's role in international mechanisms and conferences.

- The Technical Session Co-Chair noted that budget decreases are not inherently negative and encouraged PRF to align its budgeting closely with the demands and needs of Country Partners.

6.20. **Decision:** The EC endorsed the 2026-2027 PRF workplan and budget.

7. Strategic Considerations to re-engage with Malaysia and Thailand (and Brunei) in PEMSEA (EC/35/DOC/07)

- 7.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the strategic considerations for re-engaging Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei, providing both historical and institutional context.
- 7.2. PEMSEA's foundational commitment to sustainable marine development was established in 2003 through the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA), which included the three countries as signatories under the Putrajaya Declaration. At that time, discussions emphasized the need for a governance institution to manage the regional partnership.
- 7.3. However, Brunei, Malaysia, and Thailand did not formally join and sign the Haikou Partnership Agreement in 2006 due to a range of potential concerns. Based on available information — though not formally documented — the reasons appear to vary by country. Financial contribution expectations and questions about governance structure have been cited as general concerns. In Thailand's case, it was noted that the country was already hosting another regional mechanism (COBSEA) at the time and was unable to support both organizations simultaneously.
- 7.4. For Malaysia, there is no formal precedent for government-level engagement, though informal collaboration is ongoing. Brunei's engagement has been limited primarily to interfacing at ASEAN working group meetings.
- 7.5. Despite the absence of formal partnerships, substantive collaboration has continued with all three countries.
- 7.6. Thailand:
- Chonburi province served as a demonstration site for PEMSEA projects from 2016–2022.
 - Burapha University and Prince of Songkla University are members of the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers and participated in the Global Biofouling Partnership, contributing to the ASEAN Biofouling Strategy and Action Plan.
 - The Port Authority of Thailand and the Ministry of Transport were involved in the Blue Solutions project and carbonization initiatives.
 - Tarutao National Park, in collaboration with local universities, has worked on strengthening marine protected area management.

- Bangkok-based firms participate annually in environmental management system certification activities.
- 7.7. Malaysia:
- The Malaysian Maritime Authority (MIMA) contributed to the 2018 National State of the Coast Report.
 - Local governments in Northern Selangor and Sepang participate in the Integrated River Basin Management project, though a formal memorandum of agreement with PEMSEA has not yet been signed.
- 7.8. Brunei:
- Participated in the Global Biofouling Project and chaired the Cyan-Maritime Transport Working Group.
 - Engagement with Brunei has mainly occurred through working groups and project-based collaboration with government ministries.
- 7.9. Ms. Gonzales outlined four reasons for initiating re-engagement at this time:
- Previous Executive Committee and country partners, including Singapore and Indonesia, expressed support for formalizing engagement. Efforts had initially been planned for 2019 but were delayed due to the pandemic;
 - There is a strategic window of opportunity to engage at the ministerial level with Council Chair concurrently the ASOEN Chair;;
 - SDS-SEA IP 2023-2030 explicitly mandates the need to re-engage Malaysia and Thailand as formal partners; and
 - Formal engagement would signal strategic intent and strengthen PEMSEA's regional representation, taking into account any political sensitivities, should there be any.
- 7.10. She highlighted the benefits of formal engagement for the region, including:
- Complete geographic coverage of East Asian Seas countries, including Timor-Leste.
 - Strengthened coordination, data sharing, and regional standards.
 - Access to additional technical expertise, private sector resources, and think tanks.
 - Enhanced regional and global representation.
- 7.11. Benefits to the countries include:
- Direct participation in shaping regional coastal and marine policy, with faster implementation compared to ASEAN mechanisms.
 - Strengthened political and technical linkages with PEMSEA.
 - Access to technical capacity, research collaboration, and potential funding, such as Thailand's work on blue carbon.
 - Opportunities for economic development through regional projects.
- 7.12. Three options for re-engagement were presented — not mutually exclusive:

- 7.13. **Option 1 — Immediate Formal Outreach:** High-level diplomatic engagement in 2026 to formally invite the countries to reconsider their partnership, potentially at the East Asian Seas Congress. This would fulfill PEMSEA's partnership mobilization objectives and strengthen its legitimacy as a fully representative regional mechanism. Risks include potential reopening of discussions on contributions and governance frameworks, and the possibility that formal outreach may not result in formal accession.
- 7.14. **Option 2 — Phased Thematic Re-engagement:** Begin with thematic collaboration (e.g., through the Blue Carbon programme) before initiating formal membership discussions, demonstrating tangible partnership value and reducing political and financial sensitivities. Risk is prolonged informal participation without a clear transition to formal partnership, and possible perceived asymmetry between members and non-members.
- 7.15. **Option 3 — Defer Formal Discussions:** Maintain the current level of informal collaboration while prioritizing existing member engagement and institutional sustainability. This is the status quo approach, but risks missing a strategic window and weakening the narrative of progressive regional expansion.
- 7.16. **Discussion:**
- 7.17. Dr. Wakita expressed support for Option 2 and suggested exploring the possibility of greater engagement with local governments. She noted that while national governments may sometimes act slowly, local governments can respond more quickly to initiatives. She added that successful engagement at the local level would increase PNLG members' visibility and allow national governments to see the benefits.
- 7.18. Dr. Kwon raised a question on why Malaysia and Thailand are not members of PEMSEA. He suggested examining the reasons why target countries have not joined and assessing their interest in formalizing engagement with PEMSEA.
- 7.19. Dr. Wakita asked whether financial contribution is not an obligation and suggested that this could be highlighted when approaching potential members.
- 7.20. The Council Chair noted that the financial aspect could be deferred and revisited once the countries have deepened their engagement and observed the benefits of investing in PEMSEA.
- 7.21. Mr. Le noted that regarding re-engagement, the 2026–2027 Workplan should be adjusted to reflect these activities. He emphasized the need to approach countries individually to discuss their interests. On the appropriate level of engagement, he suggested that PRF review the relevant ministries and agencies PEMSEA has previously interfaced with (e.g., MOE, MFA) and determine which agencies can be engaged regularly based on their mandates.

7.22. Dr. Xinwei added that to encourage countries to join, it is important to identify the appropriate departments to engage. She further emphasized highlighting the countries' existing involvement in PEMSEA initiatives, such as PNLG, to provide a strong basis for formal membership.

7.23. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the strategic options presented for re-engaging Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei in PEMSEA. The PRF Secretariat indicated a preference for Option 2, which includes exploring informal pathways through the PC Chair in his capacity as ASOEN Chair. The EC discussed the importance of identifying the appropriate national agency to interface within each target country, reviewing past engagement history to determine which ministries — such as the Ministry of Environment or Ministry of Foreign Affairs — are best positioned to serve as counterparts. Members also raised the importance of clarifying that financial contribution is not a prerequisite for initial engagement, to lower barriers to participation.

7.24. **Recommendations:**

- The Intergovernmental Session Chair advised that target countries should be approached individually to understand their specific interests and assess their willingness to formalize engagement with PEMSEA.
- The Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair recommended that PRF identify the appropriate ministry or agency to interface within each target country, based on past engagement history and mandate alignment. It is equally important to highlight what these countries have already contributed within the PEMSEA framework — such as their involvement in PNLG — as this existing participation provides a strong basis for encouraging formal membership.
- The Technical Session Chair encouraged the Council Chair to personally engage the target countries, including through bilateral meetings on the sidelines of ASEAN-related events.
- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended exploring local government engagement in target countries as a complementary pathway, as local governments may respond more quickly to PEMSEA initiatives and can demonstrate tangible benefits to national governments through PNLG membership.
- The Technical Session Chair proposed that financial contribution discussions should be deferred in early re-engagement discussions, with the option to revisit once engagement has deepened and countries have seen the benefits of PEMSEA membership.

7.25. **Decision:** The EC endorsed the proposed plan for re-engaging with Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei as formal PEMSEA country partners.

8. PEMSEA Youth Engagement Readiness and Pilot Program (EC/35/DOC/08)

- 8.1. Ms. Abigail Cruzada, Secretariat Coordinator of PRF, shared the rationale, objectives and components of the proposed PEMSEA Youth Engagement Readiness and Pilot Program (YERPP).
- 8.2. By way of background, PEMSEA has engaged youth through various modalities over the years, including six East Asian Seas Youth Forums since 2006, the establishment of the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders (PNYL) during the 2008 East Asian Seas Congress, a youth small grants programme under the SDS-SEA project (2015–2018) providing seed grants of up to USD 3,000, a video competition in 2021, support for youth participation in international conferences such as the Blue Marine Conference, and an internship programme hosting early career ocean professionals at PRF.
- 8.3. However, youth engagement has remained largely event-based and sporadic, constrained by the absence of a sustained funding mechanism and a formal institutional pathway between EAS Congress cycles. The PNYL, while established, was never formally institutionalized and has not been consistently active.
- 8.4. The YERPP was developed in direct response to this gap. It is anchored in the updated SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2020–2030, which under Strategic Objective 2 explicitly targets the reinvigoration of the PNYL, and which identifies youth as a key enabler for capacity building, partnerships, and institutional sustainability.
- 8.5. The objective of the programme is to develop a sustainable youth engagement model through capacity building of early career ocean professionals and to develop a roadmap for institutionalizing a permanent youth programme under PEMSEA and revitalizing the PNYL. The programme has five components:
 - **Component 1 — Capacity Development and Readiness Building:** Conduct two to three online capacity building modules per year, in collaboration with partner organizations. Includes an in-person session to co-design the PNYL Roadmap 2027–2032 with alumni of previous forums and former PNYL members.
 - **Component 2 — Engagement in PEMSEA Project-Based Activities:** Selected participants will be embedded in workshops and trainings under PEMSEA regional projects, matched to their areas of expertise, including contributions such as case studies and knowledge products.
 - **Component 3 — Knowledge and Communications:** Development of knowledge and communications outputs by youth participants, to be disseminated across the region.

- **Component 4 — Participation in PEMSEA Governance Meetings:** Recognizing that limited access to governance processes is a key barrier to meaningful youth engagement in ocean governance, this component will provide travel support and facilitation for selected participants to attend PEMSEA governance meetings, including the annual Partnership Council meeting.
 - **Component 5 — Youth Contribution to the EAS Congress 2027:** A drafting session will be convened with alumni to develop youth-led programme concepts and session outcomes for the upcoming East Asian Seas Congress.
- 8.6. Funding for the programme will be blended, drawing on support from partner organizations and regional projects, with resource mobilization targeting academic institutions and youth organizations in the region. The programme is designed to run through to December 2026, with key deliverables mapped against this timeline.
- 8.7. The EC was requested to provide strategic guidance on the institutional direction and level of ambition for youth engagement, and to advise on key parameters to guide the development of the PNYL Roadmap 2027–2032 for subsequent consideration by the Partnership Council.
- 8.8. Discussion:**
- 8.9. Dr. Wakita expressed strong support for the initiative, acknowledging both its importance and the inherent difficulty of sustaining youth engagement given the proliferation of competing youth-focused programmes across international organizations.
- 8.10. She noted that PEMSEA's comparative strength lies not in science per se, but in governance and practitioner-level engagement. The Technical Session Co-Chair suggested that the programme focus on targeting young national and local government officers — the future decision-makers and leaders who, if engaged early, would develop a long-standing understanding of and support for PEMSEA's work.
- 8.11. Dr. Wakita noted that even where government support for participation may be unavailable, individual youth participants who join through the Forum can become future advocates and champions for coastal governance.
- 8.12. The Council Chair suggested considering the establishment of a pool of PEMSEA-trained alumni as coastal resource advocates or ambassadors — noting that PEMSEA maintains a directory of individuals who have undergone its training programmes, and that these individuals could serve as an ongoing network of practitioners and advocates even after they have advanced in their careers.
- 8.13. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the design and readiness of the PEMSEA Youth Engagement Pilot Program. The EC acknowledged the challenges of sustaining youth engagement over time and raised questions about the target beneficiary profile and how to build a lasting network of youth engaged with coastal and ocean management.

8.14. **Recommendations:**

- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended targeting on-the-ground practitioners, young local government officers, and national officers — rather than ocean scientists — as the primary audience, as these groups are more likely to directly apply PEMSEA's tools and approaches in coastal management.
- The Council Chair proposed the development of youth ambassadors for coastal management as a mechanism for sustainability and knowledge transfer, building a network of professionals who continue to champion PEMSEA's principles throughout their careers.
- The Council Chair also added that the youth program should include a directory or registry of youth participants to track engagement and build a sustainable network over time.

8.15. **Decision:** The EC approved the PEMSEA Youth Engagement Readiness and Pilot Program.

9. Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report (EC/35/DOC/09)

- 9.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the results and recommendations of the Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report, an initiative led by the Regional Collaborative Network for MPAs. The report was developed by PEMSEA Resource Facility, as PEMSEA's contribution to the Network.
- 9.2. The Executive Director noted that the initiative originated from agreements and discussions during the East Asian Seas Congress in Xiamen, and was further advanced through subsequent global platforms, including the Our Ocean Conference in Busan and the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France. These engagements led to the establishment of a regional collaborative network of nine organizations, including PEMSEA, COBSEA, the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, the Coral Triangle Initiative, IOC-WESTPAC, IUCN, the North-East Asian MPA Network, and the South China Sea Strategic Action Plan project.
- 9.3. The network aims to support countries in achieving the 30x30 target under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The collaboration focuses on:
- Mapping regional and national MPA and OECM initiatives;
 - Sharing tools, knowledge, platforms, and best practices;
 - Conducting joint capacity-building and training activities;
 - Supporting resource mobilization efforts; and
 - Strengthening linkages between regional and global platforms.

- 9.4. PEMSEA, with support from partner institutions, led the development of a regional MPA report to consolidate data and provide analysis across the East Asian Seas region. The report includes information on existing and planned MPAs, governance arrangements, tools, best practices, and lessons learned. It is intended for use by practitioners, planners, managers, and policymakers. The report does not duplicate existing global or regional databases, but instead provides a situational and analytical perspective on MPAs and OECMs within the EAS region. A draft of the report has been circulated and is subject to further review by country partners.
- 9.5. Key findings from the report include:
- 9.6. On progress achieved, the report noted a rapid expansion of MPAs aligned with the 30x30 targets; presence of strong policy frameworks across countries; and active regional networks and partnerships supporting implementation.
- 9.7. However, critical gaps still remain, such as:
- Coverage gaps, including the persistence of “paper parks”;
 - Fragmented and non-representative protection, particularly in offshore and migratory ecosystems;
 - Limited ecological connectivity at the regional level;
 - Institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates in some countries;
 - Under-recognition of community-based governance and OECMs;
 - Lack of clarity in definitions, reporting, and monitoring of OECMs.
- 9.8. She emphasized that while national-level efforts are progressing, regional coordination and integration remain limited.
- 9.9. Ms. Gonzales outlined key recommendations from a regional perspective, including:
- Shifting from area-based targets to outcome-based conservation;
 - Strengthening ecological connectivity across ecosystems and subregions;
 - Recognizing and empowering community and customary governance systems;
 - Enhancing cross-sectoral and regional coordination;
 - Scaling up OECMs alongside MPAs; and
 - Strengthening institutional capacity, monitoring, and implementation mechanisms.
- 9.10. She added that these recommendations are being incorporated into a funding proposal to be further developed and presented to potential partners and donors.
- 9.11. In closing, Ms. Gonzales emphasized that achieving the 30x30 target will require not only expanding coverage but also ensuring effective, inclusive, and well-connected management systems across the region.

- 9.12. **Discussion:**
- 9.13. Dr. Wakita inquired whether PEMSEA is targeting a more regional, seascape-level approach to marine protected areas (MPAs), noting that national boundaries are often not aligned with ecological systems and that a regional perspective could enhance effectiveness.
- 9.14. Ms. Aimee Gonzales responded that while this is a valid point, progress is already being made at the project level. She cited examples such as the Turtle Islands Heritage Protected Area, a transboundary initiative between Malaysia and the Philippines, and ongoing work under the South China Sea project, including collaboration with partners such as IUCN and the Coral Triangle Initiative.
- 9.15. Dr. Wakita acknowledged the benefits of these efforts and noted that such work could serve as a basis for MPA-related organizations to further explore and strengthen regional collaboration in the future.
- 9.16. Dr. Yu emphasized the importance of adopting an outcome-based approach for the initiative, noting that it represents a joint effort to unite stakeholders across the region. She observed that countries in the region apply different standards and criteria, which may affect consistency in implementation. In this regard, she encouraged the use of broader and more inclusive standards to capture and consolidate the range of efforts being undertaken.
- 9.17. Dr. Yu noted that such an approach would help better reflect regional progress and encourage wider participation.
- 9.18. Taking of his Chair's hat, Usec Leones mentioned that the Philippines is currently involved in finalizing guidelines for the identification of OECEMs in the Philippines, which presents an opportunity for broader engagement.
- 9.19. The Secretariat took note of the comments and suggestions of the EC members and will relay them to the other regional organizations involved in the MPA network initiative.
- 9.20. **Conclusion:** The EC acknowledged progress in regional MPA networks, seascape-level collaboration, and the integration of multiple initiatives across countries. Members noted ongoing work at the project level, including collaboration with Malaysia on the Turtle Island Sanctuary and potential engagement through the South China Sea SAP and CTI-CFF with IUCN. The EC acknowledged that different countries apply varying standards and criteria for MPAs, and noted the challenge of institutional fragmentation at the national level, using the Philippines as an example where coastal management oversight is shared across multiple agencies.

9.21. Recommendations:

- The Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair encouraged an outcome-based approach to the regional MPA work, to clearly demonstrate collective efforts and joint impact across the region. Furthermore, the PRF should consolidate regional efforts and promote a wide range of standards and criteria to capture the breadth of MPA-related work across member countries.
- The Council Chair recommended that PRF should identify relevant agencies and stakeholders per country to deepen engagement at the national and local level, and provide inputs to support policy updates based on data collected through the report.

9.22. **Decision:** The EC endorsed the Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report

10. Updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon program (EC/35/DOC/09)

- 10.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales provided updates on PEMSEA’s Blue Carbon initiatives. She reported that three programs for 2025 are being implemented under the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group (TWG), which was previously chaired by the former Technical Session Chair, Dr. Keita Furukawa and has now been formally turned over to the current Technical Session Chair, Dr. Kwon. The TWG comprises experts on blue carbon ecosystems, country representatives, and other stakeholders.
- 10.2. The TWG has developed several key frameworks and tools, including guidance on blue carbon ecosystem services management mechanisms and associated project frameworks with ecosystem-specific annexes covering mangroves, seagrass, and salt marshes. Capacity-building activities have also been conducted, including three TWG meetings hosted with support from the University of Hawai’i and the National Marine Hazard Mitigation Service of China. Meetings were convened in Thailand and other locations with the support of partner institutions.
- 10.3. She further reported that a concept note entitled “Blue PASS” has been developed. The initiative focuses on strengthening baselines, monitoring and verification systems, and benefit-sharing mechanisms for blue carbon projects. The concept is currently under review by UNDP as a potential implementing partner for the proposed project.
- 10.4. Ms. Gonzales also informed the Committee that a “Knowledge to Action” workshop on scaling blue carbon initiatives in the region was organized on March 24-25, 2026. The workshop brought together members of the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers to review the Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol and explore ways to strengthen technical capacity and collaboration across countries. Experts from the University of Hawai’i, the Marine Science Institute, and other institutions participated as resource persons.

- 10.5. Outcomes of the workshop include an agreed engagement plan for Network of Learning Centers on blue carbon, strengthened regional collaboration and technical support, and recommendations for scaling blue carbon initiatives in the region. The workshop report is currently being finalized.
- 10.6. In addition, Ms. Gonzales introduced a new concept under development—the J-Blue Learning Exchange with ASEAN Member States. The initiative aims to strengthen regional capacity in blue carbon ecosystem management by drawing lessons from Japan’s J-Blue Economy initiative, which integrates carbon trading with biodiversity conservation and community-based project implementation.
- 10.7. She noted that discussions with stakeholders have shown strong interest in learning from Japan’s approaches to ecosystem-based projects such as seaweed, seagrass, and coastal restoration initiatives, including their crediting, accounting, and market mechanisms. PEMSEA is collaborating with experts including Mr. Brian Takeda and Dr. Keita Furukawa to develop a five-day learning program in partnership with Japanese institutions. Initial expressions of interest have been received from participants in Indonesia and Norway, and policymakers from the Philippines have also indicated interest.
- 10.8. Ms. Gonzales explained that the program will operate on a cost-recovery basis, with PEMSEA contributing approximately USD 5,000 for concept development and preparation of the pilot program. Expected outputs include potential learnings and lessons that can be adapted to developing pilot project proposal, strengthening linkages with Japanese institutions and private sector partners, and recommendations related to Article 6 engagement and voluntary carbon market pathways.
- 10.9. She noted that the concept is still under development and was presented for information.
- 10.10. Discussion:**
- 10.11. Dr. Kwon provided information on the upcoming International Seminar on Blue Carbon scheduled for 23–24 April. She noted that partner countries, institutional members, and experts in blue carbon, including representatives from J-Blue, have been invited to participate.
- 10.12. He explained that the seminar will be organized into three sessions: (i) an overview of blue carbon and country trends; (ii) technical approaches and methodologies; and (iii) discussions on how to support the PEMSEA framework and mobilize support.
- 10.13. Dr. Kwon added that the 2025 PNLG Forum, which will be hosted by Busan Metropolitan City, is also exploring the inclusion of dedicated sessions on blue carbon.
- 10.14. Dr. Wakita shared that Dr. Keita Furukawa will continue his support in the PEMSEA Blue Carbon program. She will meet with MLIT and OPRI both of which will join the Blue Carbon

Seminar. She asked if there are any specific targets to submit the proposal for future Blue Carbon projects given its high potential to get funds.

- 10.15. Ms. Aimee Gonzales shared that the Bluepass concept proposal has been shared to UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub for review and application for GEF 9 replenishment fund consideration for GEF. She also informed the group of a pending ROK support to implement 2026 PEMSEA Blue Carbon activities.

Note to EC: ROK has approved funding PEMSEA’s Blue carbon program for 2026

- 10.16. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program, including progress on the BluPass Project proposal, for which a draft concept note has been submitted to UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub for GEF-9 funding consideration. The EC also noted the upcoming Second International Seminar on Blue Carbon scheduled for April 22–24 in Busan, hosted by KIOST and KMI, with results to be presented at the PNLG Forum in September.

- 10.17. **Recommendations:**

- The EC encouraged continued alignment of national and regional blue carbon initiatives with PEMSEA's Blue Carbon Framework and the identification of concrete financial pathways for project implementation.
- The Council Chair encouraged the PRF to participate in and share its initiatives at the upcoming Blue Carbon Forum in the Philippines.
- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended that PRF set a target timeline for finalizing and submitting the blue carbon project proposal and securing the program budget.

- 10.18. **Decision:** The EC noted the updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program.

11. Updates on Organizational Capacity Assessment Scaling up and Business Development and Resource Mobilization (EC/35/DOC/11)

- 11.1. Ms. Abigail Cruzada presented updates on two interrelated workstreams: the scaling up of the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) pilot, and the Business Development and Resource Mobilization (BDRM) initiative — both of which are designed to strengthen PEMSEA's institutional sustainability and translate the outcomes of the SDS-SEA strategic programming review into actionable organizational measures.
- 11.2. On the OCA Scaling Up, Ms. Cruzada recalled that during the 34th EC Meeting, members had underscored the importance of translating OCA results into practical country-level application. In response, PRF initiated pilot testing of the capacity development approach in selected countries to assess its relevance, adaptability, and potential for wider rollout.

- 11.3. The Philippines has confirmed participation and conducted an inception workshop on February 11, 2026, with representatives from relevant units of DENR in attendance. The workshop served to contextualize OCA findings at the national level, identify priority capacity gaps, and explore alignment with country-specific implementation needs. Feedback from this pilot will inform refinement of the broader framework prior to scaling up across the Partnership.
- 11.4. The indicative timeline for the OCA pilot in the Philippines runs through July 2026, with key milestones including: customized OCA tool (March 2026); self-assessment sessions (April 2026); draft country OCA report (May 2026); virtual presentation with DENR (June 2026); and final OCA report (July 2026). The methodology is participatory, evidence-based, and context-responsive, combining tool co-development, structured self-assessment, and collaborative capacity-building with PEMSEA's HR lead to translate OCA findings into unit-level and individual capacity development plans, performance metrics, learning pathways, and a multi-year capacity development roadmap.
- 11.5. On the Business Development and Resource Mobilization (BDRM) component, a BDRM Specialist has been engaged to develop and operationalize a PEMSEA Business Plan — an integrated framework aligning strategic programming, institutional capacity strengthening, and resource mobilization.
- 11.6. A draft Resource Mobilization Strategy and Plan has been developed, including a structured donor and engagement package aimed at diversifying and expanding the Partnership's financial base, drawing directly from OCA findings and key SDS-SEA priorities.
- 11.7. The BDRM workplan is structured across seven phases running from December 2025 to July 2026, covering: inception and alignment; strategy development and donor mapping; value proposition and donor briefs; capacity building and institutional design; proposal development and tools creation; leadership engagement and donor/partner event planning; and reporting and handover.
- 11.8. Key deliverables include a Business Development and Resource Mobilization Strategy document, donor and partner mapping report, priority donor briefs and business model canvas, standardized proposal and pitch templates, training modules for staff and leadership, and an organizational function description for fundraising and business development.
- 11.9. The EC was requested to provide feedback and guidance on the proposed approach, and specifically to advise on: funding strategy and pipeline development; funding diversification; donor and investor relations; identification of partners that could accelerate growth; and risk identification and resilience building.

11.10. Discussion:

11.11. Chair emphasized the need to identify all pipeline projects to prepare concept notes for funding agencies. He suggested leveraging the PEMSEA Youth initiative to publicize PEMSEA activities, develop ambassadors, and garner support. He further noted that, based on this, collaborative arrangements could be developed in the three countries to implement activities and enhance engagement.

11.12. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the updates on PEMSEA's organizational capacity assessment and business development and resource mobilization efforts.

11.13. Recommendation:

- The Council Chair highlighted the importance of converting pipeline projects into concrete concept notes to submit to funding agencies, and of leveraging youth engagement initiatives to publicize PEMSEA activities and build a broader base of support.
- The Council Chair also recommended that collaborative implementation arrangements across member countries should be explored and formalized as part of resource mobilization efforts.

11.14. **Decision:** The EC noted the Updates on PEMSEA Organizational Capacity Assessment Scaling up and Business Development and Resource Mobilization.

12. Other Business (EC/35/DOC/12)

12.1. Ms. Abigail Cruzada provided updates on four items under Other Business.

12.2. First, regarding preparations for the East Asian Seas Congress, she noted that following the 17th Partnership Council Meeting last year, a formal letter was sent to Indonesia and preliminary consultations were conducted with the Philippines regarding potential hosting of the next Congress. The current status is that Indonesia is positively reviewing the request, with a formal confirmation expected by the third week of April, as internal clearances are being completed.

12.3. Second, on Congress timeline and planning, the EAS Congress is tentatively scheduled for the last quarter of 2027. Dates will be finalized after monitoring other international conferences and receiving formal confirmation from Indonesia, after which the theme, program structure, and workplan will be agreed upon.

12.4. Third, regarding the search for the Partnership Council Co-Chair, the position remains vacant to date, with no nominations received since a renewed call was posted in November. The nomination period will be extended until 26 May, and EC members are

requested to encourage country and non-country partners to submit nominations. Guidance will be sought on alternative arrangements if the positions remain vacant after the deadline.

- 12.5. Finally, Ms. Cruzada introduced a PRF initiative to establish an annual “Partnership Day” to recognize and enhance the visibility of PEMSEA among partners and in the region. The initiative aims to strengthen regional identity, communication, and collaboration. The proposed timing is around the same month as the Audit Committee meeting, to include social media campaigns, partner engagement, youth initiatives, and publication of high-level messages.
- 12.6. **Conclusion:** The EC noted updates on three matters: (1) the EAS Congress, for which Indonesia has provided an internally positive response to hosting, with a formal update expected by end of April; (2) the search for an EAS PC Co-Chair, for which nominations are being solicited — members noted the importance of filling the position as part of leadership transition planning, and encouraged a mixed Council Co-Chair composition including countries not currently represented in the EC; and (3) the establishment of PEMSEA Day, with December 15 identified as the Founding Day of PEMSEA.

Note: Indonesia has agreed to host EAS Congress 2027

12.7. Recommendations:

- The Council Chair recommended to proceed with discussions with Indonesia regarding the hosting of the EAS Congress and aim for a positive outcome.
- The Council Chair encouraged EC members and Country Partners to submit nominations for the EAS PC Co-Chair position.
- The Technical Session Co-Chair recommended that the Council Chair and PRF to approach candidate countries personally, including through bilateral meetings on the sidelines of ASEAN-related events. Furthermore, it was recommended that countries who were not represented in the current lineup of the Executive Committee be prioritized.
- The Council Chair mentioned that the timing and modality for celebrating PEMSEA Day should be determined and endorsed to the Partnership Council.

- 12.8. **Decision:** The EC approved and endorsed the updates on the EAS Congress, the search for EAS PC Co-Chair, and establishing PEMSEA Day.

13. Closing of the 35th Executive Committee Meeting

- 13.1. Usec Leones noted that the meeting had been productive and highlighted that significant ground was covered, including governance, international matters, and strategic issues that will guide PEMSEA’s direction toward 2030. He thanked each Executive Committee

member for their engagement, thoughtful participation, and confidence in the guidance provided, which will support the Secretariat and the broader partnership in preparation for the 18th East Asian Seas Congress. He also expressed appreciation to ED Aimee and the PRF Secretariat for the thorough preparation of meeting documents and for managing the proceedings.

- 13.2. He reminded members that the summary of conclusions and recommendations would be circulated and encouraged all EC members to prioritize the review of the audit report submission to the BIR to maintain the agreed processing schedule.
- 13.3. Finally, Usec Leones took a personal moment to acknowledge that it was the last working day of Ms. Francesca Cortez. On behalf of the Executive Committee, he extended best wishes for her future career and thanked her for her contributions and assistance over the past two years.
- 13.4. The meeting was adjourned at 13:30.

Annex 1 - Agenda

Day	Time	No	Agenda
March 30			Arrival of Executive Committee Members
Expanded Executive Committee (EC) Meeting			
March 31	9:00 - 9:05	1.0	Opening of the Meeting and Approval of the Meeting Agenda The Council Chair will open the 35th Executive Committee meeting and request the secretariat to present the Meeting Agenda for review/approval of the Executive Committee (EC)
	9:05 - 9:15	2.0	Approval of Schedule of interview for PRF ED Selection and recruitment panel The Secretariat will present the schedule of interview for the PRF ED Selection and the recruitment panel
	9:15 - 9:25	3.0	Approval of Revised 18th EAS PC Meeting agenda The Secretariat will present the revised agenda for the 18th EAS PC meeting
	9:25 - 9:40	4.0	Audited Financial Statement 2025 and Audit Committee Meeting The Secretariat will discuss the Audited Financial Statement 2025 and the results of Audit Committee Meeting
	9:40 - 9:55	5.0	2025 Accomplishment Report The Secretariat will discuss 2025 accomplishments and future outlook and challenges post 2026
	9:55 - 10:05	6.0	2026-2027 PRF workplan and budget The Secretariat will present the 2026-2027 PRF Workplan and budget, for endorsement to the Intergovernmental Session during the 18th EAS PC Meeting
	10:05 - 10:15		Health Break
	10:15- 10:30	7.0	Strategic considerations to re-engage with Malaysia and Thailand (and Brunei) in PEMSEA
	10:30 - 10:50	8.0	PEMSEA Youth Engagement Readiness and Pilot Program

			The Secretariat will present the proposed Youth engagement readiness program, as a preparatory phase for the establishment of a permanent PEMSEA Young Leaders Program
	10:50 - 11:10	9.0	Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report The Secretariat will present the report on Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas for endorsement to the 18th EAS Partnership council.
	11:10 - 11:25	10.0	Updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program The Secretariat will discuss the updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program
	11:25 - 11:35	11.0	Updates on PEMSEA Organizational Capacity Assessment Scaling up and Business Development and Resource Mobilization The Secretariat will present updates on OCA scaling up and the Business Development and Resource Mobilization
	11:35 - 11:50	12.0	Other Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Updates on EAS Congress 2027 preparations ● Update on the search for EAS PC Co-Chair ● PEMSEA Day
	11:45 - 11:50		Secretariat Announcements
	11:50 - 12:00		Closing of the 35th Executive Committee Meeting

Annex 2 - Presentation, meeting documents, and photos

- a. Presentation - [LINK](#)
- b. Meeting Documents - [LINK](#)
- c. Photos - [LINK](#)

Annex 3 - List of participants

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Atty. Jonas Leones

EAS PC Chair and Undersecretary for
Policy, Planning and International Affairs
Department of Environment and Natural
Resources
Philippines

Dr. Suk-Jae KWON

Technical Session Chair
Korea Institute for Ocean Science and
Technology
RO Korea

Dr. Kazumi WAKITA

Technical Session Co-Chair
Professor at the School of Marine Science
and Technology
Tokai University
Japan

Mr. Le Dai THANG

Intergovernmental Session Chair and
Deputy Director
Department of Marine Resources Control
and Marine, Island
Environment Protection
Vietnam Agency of Seas and Islands (VASI)
Ministry of Agriculture and Environment
(MAE)
Vietnam

Dr. YU Xinwei

Intergovernmental Session Co- Chair
Deputy Division Director,
Department of International
Cooperation
Ministry of Natural Resources
P.R. China

OBSERVERS

Mr. Zhao Linlin

Deputy Director
CHINA-PEMSEA Sustainable Coastal
Management Cooperation Center
P.R. China

Maritess P. Romena

Officer-in-Charge
Project Monitoring and Evaluation Division
Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects
Service
Department of Environment and Natural
Resources
Philippines

Ms. Khasmer Marbella

Project Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Foreign-Assisted and Special Projects
Service
Department of Environment and Natural
Resources
Philippines

Ms. Abegail Rivera

Project Monitoring and Evaluation Officer
Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and
International Affairs
Department of Environment and Natural
Resources
Philippines

PEMSEA RESOURCE FACILITY

Ms. Aimee Gonzales

Executive Director

Ms. Abigail Fiona Cruzada

Secretariat Coordinator

Ms. Jeanne Francesca Cortez

Secretariat and Training and Capacity
Development Assistant

Ms. Mary Ann Dela Pena

Finance Specialist

Mr. John Castillo

Visual Communications Officer

Dr. Won-tae Shin

Regional Program Manager, Marine Plastics
ODA Project

Ms. Nancy Bermas

Regional Program Manager, IRBM Project

Mr. Renato Cardinal

Program Manager, PRICELESS Project
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Mr. Hunguen Kim

Senior Manager, Marine Plastics ODA
Project

PEMSEA Resource Facility

Ms. Diwata Cayaban

Executive Assistant
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Mr. Jun Dacaymat

IT Assistant
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Ms. Elsie Merina

Program Associate
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Ms. Klyra Orbien

Communications Officer
PEMSEA Resource Facility