



# **Proceedings of the Eighteenth East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting**

July 22-23, 2026  
Aloft Novena Singapore  
16 Ah Hood Rd, Singapore  
Hybrid, face-to-face and Zoom

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|     |                                                                                                                     |    |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1.  | OPENING OF THE 18th EAS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL (PC) MEETING                                                            | 4  |
| 2.  | ADOPTION OF THE MEETING AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/01)                                                                       | 5  |
| 3.  | REPORT OF THE EAS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL CHAIR (PC/18/DOC/02)                                                          | 5  |
| 4.  | REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PC/18/DOC/03)                                                                     | 7  |
| 5.  | ELECTION OF THE COUNCIL CO-CHAIR AND OATH TAKING (PC/18/DOC/04)                                                     | 12 |
| 6.  | RESULTS OF THE SELECTION OF THE NEW PRF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PC/18/DOC/05)                                           | 14 |
| 7.  | ANY OTHER BUSINESS — PNLG AND PNLC WORK PLANS 2026–2027 (PC/18/DOC/06)                                              | 15 |
| 8.  | CLOSING OF THE COUNCIL SESSION                                                                                      | 18 |
| 9.  | OPENING OF THE TECHNICAL SESSION (TS) AND ADOPTION OF THE TS AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/07)                                  | 19 |
| 10. | UPDATES ON THE PEMSEA BLUE CARBON PROGRAM AND LAUNCH OF THE REGIONAL BLUE CARBON ACCOUNTING PROTOCOL (PC/18/DOC/08) | 20 |
| 11. | 2027 EAST ASIAN SEAS CONGRESS UPDATES (PC/18/DOC/09)                                                                | 27 |
| 12. | MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE EAST ASIAN SEAS REPORT (PC/18/DOC/10)                                                 | 29 |
| 13. | PRF PROJECT UPDATES (PC/18/DOC/12)                                                                                  | 32 |
| 14. | PEMSEA YOUNG LEADERS' READINESS PROGRAM (PC/18/DOC/11)                                                              | 42 |
| 15. | OTHER BUSINESS (PC/18/DOC/13)                                                                                       | 46 |
| 16. | CLOSING OF THE TECHNICAL SESSION                                                                                    | 47 |
| 17. | OPENING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSION (IGS) AND ADOPTION OF THE IGS AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/14)                        | 47 |
| 18. | UPDATES ON THE PEMSEA SUSTAINABILITY PLAN (PC/18/DOC/15)                                                            | 48 |
| 19. | PRF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2026–2027 (PC/18/DOC/16)                                                               | 52 |
| 20. | SUMMARY AND APPROVAL OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL MEETING (PC/18/DOC/18)           | 54 |
| 21. | PRF SECRETARIAT ANNOUNCEMENTS                                                                                       | 54 |

# **18th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting**

22 July 2026, 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM (UTC+8)

23 July 2026, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM (UTC+8)

Aloft Novena Singapore, 16 Ah Hood Rd, Singapore, and Zoom

## **PROCEEDINGS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

- I. The 18th East Asian Seas (EAS) Partnership Council (PC) Meeting was held on July 22-23, 2026 at Aloft Novena Singapore, 16 Ah Hood Rd in Singapore.

Onsite participants of the meeting included the EAS PC Chair and Co-Chair; the Technical Session Chair and Co-Chair; the Intergovernmental Session Chair and Co-Chair; the Executive Director of the PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF); Country Partners (CPs) from Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Lao PDR, Philippines, Republic of Korea (RoKorea), Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam; Non-Country Partners (NCPs) from the ASEAN Center for Biodiversity (ACB), Korea Institute for Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST), Korea Maritime Institute (KMI), Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation (KOEM), National Marine Hazard Mitigation Service (NMHMS), Ocean Policy Research Institute – Sasakawa Peace Foundation (OPRI-SPF), Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL), and the PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG). Observers include the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) and the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC). The meeting also welcomed its first-ever youth delegate, Dr. Kenny Pang of the Singapore Institute of Technology.

Online participants included CP representatives from Singapore and the Philippines, and NCPs from the International Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas Center (EMECS), International Ocean Institute (IOI), International Union for Conservation of Nature - Asia Regional Office (IUCN-ARO), NMHMS, and Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML). The PRF team, led by the Secretariat Coordinator, served as the Secretariat.

- II. Supporting documents may be found in the Annexes:
  - A. Annex 1.0 - Agenda of the meeting
  - B. Annex 2.0 - Intervention of the Youth Delegate
  - C. Annex 3.0 - Meeting Documents
  - D. Annex 4.0 - Main Presentation
  - E. Annex 5.0 - Meeting Photos
  - F. Annex 6.0 - List of Participants

## COUNCIL SESSION (JULY 22, 2026 | 9:00 AM–11:08 AM)

### **1. OPENING OF THE 18th EAS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL (PC) MEETING**

- 1.1. The meeting commenced at 9:00 AM (UTC+8). The PRF Secretariat Coordinator, Ms. April Ann Tigulo, opened the session and welcomed participants on behalf of the PEMSEA Resource Facility and the EAS Partnership Council. She extended appreciation to the Government of Singapore, particularly the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Development, the Ministry of Transport, and the National Parks Board, for co-hosting the meeting.
- 1.2. Mr. Ranjeet Singh, Divisional Director for International Policy at MSE and Permanent Representative of Singapore to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), delivered the Welcome Remarks on behalf of the Government of Singapore as host. He welcomed delegates to Singapore and underscored the ecological and economic significance of the East Asian Seas region, noting that it holds 31% of the world's mangroves and 33% of its seagrass, and that country partners together account for around 80% of global aquaculture and 60% of the world's captured fisheries. He cited intensifying regional challenges, including coral bleaching across the Coral Triangle and more frequent, severe flooding in coastal cities such as Manila and Ho Chi Minh driven by stronger monsoons, set against the opportunities of the blue, green, and blue-green economy. He highlighted that the shared commitment towards the sustainable development of coastal and marine areas requires strong regional coordination and cooperation, especially as climate change and geopolitical developments increasingly impact the EAS region. He also noted progress under the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) Implementation Plan 2023-2030 launched in December 2025, including the finalization of the annexes of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol (RBCAP), and the election of the EAS Partnership Council Co-Chair. He concluded by thanking PRF for its close partnership in organizing the meeting and wishing participants fruitful discussions over the two days.
- 1.3. Following the introduction of participants, the Council Chair, Atty. Jonas R. Leones, formally declared the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting open.
- 1.4. In his Opening Remarks, he acknowledged the gathering as occurring at a critical moment, the midpoint to the 2030 global goals and targets, and underscored the

urgency of protecting coastal and ocean ecosystems. He recognized his fellow Executive Committee members: Mr. Le Dai Thang, Intergovernmental Session (IGS) Chair; Dr. Yu Xinwei, IGS Co-Chair; Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon, Technical Session (TS) Chair; and Dr. Kazumi Wakita, TS Co-Chair. He also acknowledged the PRF secretariat team, led by Executive Director (ED) Ms. Aimee Gonzales.

## **2. ADOPTION OF THE MEETING AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/01)**

- 2.1. PRF Secretariat Coordinator, Ms. April Ann Tigulo, presented the Provisional Agenda of the Council Session.
- 2.2. The Council Chair opened the floor for any comments, additions, or amendments to the agenda. No amendments were proposed. Mr. Roath Sith of Cambodia moved to adopt the agenda as presented.
- 2.3. **Decision:** The agenda of the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting was adopted.

## **3. REPORT OF THE EAS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL CHAIR (PC/18/DOC/02)**

- 3.1. The Council Chair presented actions taken on major conclusions, recommendations, and decisions made by the EAS PC during the 17th EAS PC Meeting, the 34th and 35th PEMSEA Executive Committee (EC) meetings, and during the intersessional period.
- 3.2. The report was organized around three key elements:
- 3.3. **On Policy:** The 17th EAS PC approved the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023–2030, the Balanced Scorecard and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) templates, the Regional Blue Carbon Program main report, and the PEMSEA institutional strengthening and financial sustainability annotated outline.
- 3.4. **On Partnership and Project Development:** The EC endorsed the Marine Protected Area (MPA) baseline report and a phased, flexible approach to re-engage with Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei as potential Country Partners.
- 3.5. **On Governance and Institutional Matters:** The 17th PC approved the Terms of Reference and recruitment timeline for the new PRF Executive Director. The Selection Committee is chaired by the Council Chair with the TS and IGS Chairs as members. The 2025 Audited Financial Statement was approved by the EC as endorsed by the Audit Committee.

- 3.6. The Council Chair opened the floor for questions and comments.
- 3.7. **Discussion highlights:**
- 3.8. Ms. Chen Danhong of China noted that PEMSEA has made solid progress over the past year, particularly in implementing the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2030, bringing partners together around a series of consensus positions including the Xiamen Declaration and setting clear guidance for future regional management. China affirmed it will continue to take an active part in regional cooperation initiatives, and reported positive progress on Blue Carbon cooperation, including improved technical guidelines, a training manual nearing completion, a preliminary assessment of its offshore blue carbon resources, and exploration of blue carbon transactions.
- 3.9. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore thanked the Council Chair for the report, which he noted summarizes good progress in advancing PEMSEA's work, and offered three observations: he commended progress in finalizing the updated SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2030, including incorporation of the Xiamen Declaration's ten action points across its four thematic areas of effective governance, healthy and resilient ocean, sustainable and inclusive blue economy, and healthy people, and its alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); he noted the need for a simplified, more effective monitoring and reporting mechanism that reduces the administrative and reporting burden on partners while preserving transparency and participation; as well as the ongoing work of the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group (TWG) and thanked RoKorea for hosting the second international seminar on blue carbon.
- 3.10. Mr. Sayid Muhadhar of Indonesia thanked the Council Chair for the concise report on the key decisions and recommendations of the PC and EC for 2025 and moved for its acceptance. Indonesia also confirmed its support to PEMSEA and funding commitment through to 2028.
- 3.11. Dr. Al Orolfo of the Philippines commended the EC for its leadership in advancing the implementation of the EAS Partnership Council's priorities and expressed its appreciation for the comprehensive report on activities undertaken during the intersessional period and likewise moved to accept the Council Chair's report.
- 3.12. **Decision:** The Council Chair's report was approved.

## 4. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PC/18/DOC/03)

- 4.1. The Council Chair invited Ms. Aimee Gonzales, PRF Executive Director (ED) to present the ED's Report covering key accomplishments in 2025 in line with the targets of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023–2030.
- 4.2. The ED highlighted that 2025 marked the midpoint to 2030 and a strategic turning point for PEMSEA as it transitioned from consolidation to strategic renewal, laying critical institutional and strategic foundations to accelerate regional action toward 2030. This was made possible by extending the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan from 2023-2027 up to 2030 to align with UN SDGs and 30x30 targets.
- 4.3. 2025's governance milestones included the onboarding of a new Executive Committee (2025-2028); preparation for leadership succession and initiation of the early planning for the 2027 EAS Congress.
- 4.4. 2025 also saw a high demand for PEMSEA's project management services through year 3 implementation of regional, multiyear grants from Global Environment Facility (GEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and RoK Official Development Assistance (ODA) and demand for PRF's technical support, capacity building services and grant administration services by various agencies (GEF Secretariat, UNOPs, ASEAN, IMO, DCEEWW Australia, etc.).
- 4.5. On Financial and Operational Accomplishments
- 4.6. The ED reported that PEMSEA maintained a healthy financial position in 2025. CY 2025 actual revenue amounted to US\$3.48 million, which exceeded the \$3-4 million annual target and CY 2026 project revenue is expected to reach US\$6.74 million, exceeding the US\$4 million target.
- 4.7. Revenues received in 2025 came from diversified funding streams:
  - **Country Contributions (2025):** US\$533,997 total, supported by China, Japan, Philippines, RoK, Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Singapore, Cambodia, and Viet Nam.
  - **Project & Management Fees (2025):** Generated through execution/management fees (US\$307,381) and direct project funds (US\$2.64 Million) across projects like the IRBM Project, RoK ODA Marine Plastics, ATSEA Program, PRICELESS, and ASEAN ENMAPs, GEF SEC grant and SEAMAP.

- 4.8. SDS-SEA Implementation in CY 2025
- 4.9. The mid-term review extended the timeframe from 2027 to 2030 to align with global targets (SDGs, UN Decade of Ocean Science) and implement the 10 action points of the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration.
- 4.10. The 17th EAS PC adopted a Balanced Scorecard (BSC) to report on progress through an M&E template shared to country partners, non-country partners, the PNLC and PNLC secretariats and PRF.
- 4.11. Results of the year's M&E indicate uneven progress as shown in the BSC 2025 table below. The BSC features seven strategic objectives with core indicators. The annual targets on partnership reach and convening capacity, effective PEMSEA governance, blue carbon program and increase in PEMSEA's revenues for 2026 were fully achieved. While good progress has been achieved on key indicators under results driven programs and organizational strengthening, there are major gaps in the report on specific indicators on sustainable livelihoods and on Blue Food and One Health initiatives. This is due to lack of information from country and non-country partners on their programs and activities. PRF intends to refine the indicators further to secure data from countries and relevant non-country partners to fulfil these targeted actions as called for in the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration.

**PEMSEA Balanced Scorecard for 2025**

| Strategic Objectives              | Indicators                                                                               | Status |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|
| <b>SO1 Catalytic Partnerships</b> | 1.1 Partnership reach, influence and convening capacity                                  |        |
|                                   | 1.2 Policy integration                                                                   |        |
|                                   | 1.3 PEMSEA brand visibility & recognition                                                |        |
| <b>SO2 Empowered Stakeholders</b> | 2.1 GESI/social inclusion                                                                |        |
|                                   | 2.2 Sustainable livelihoods                                                              |        |
|                                   | 2.3 Blue Food, One Health                                                                |        |
| <b>SO3 Results Driven Program</b> | 3.1 Effective PEMSEA governance                                                          |        |
|                                   | 3.2 Strategic growth in coverage, application and benefits of ICM                        |        |
|                                   | 3.3 Improved management performance of priority coastal, marine, and river basin systems |        |
|                                   | 3.4 SOC and SORB reporting system                                                        |        |
|                                   | 3.5 Blue Carbon Initiatives                                                              |        |

| Strategic Objectives                    | Indicators                                                                                            | Status    |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
|                                         | 3.6 Complementary Initiatives: Facilitation and Technical Support through ATSEA, NCPs, PRF services   | Completed |
| <b>SO4 Knowledge to Action</b>          | 4.1 Knowledge, capacity, and learning initiatives in coastal and ocean governance                     | Ongoing   |
|                                         | 4.2 Joint or cross-network initiatives                                                                | Ongoing   |
| <b>SO5 Strengthened Leadership</b>      | 5.1 PEMSEA Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool and Organizational Capacity Development Plan | Ongoing   |
| <b>SO6 Financing Solutions</b>          | 6.1 Sustainable Financing for SDS-SEA implementation                                                  | Ongoing   |
|                                         | 6.2 Blue Economy enabling systems and investments                                                     | Ongoing   |
| <b>SO7 Institutional Sustainability</b> | 7.1 PEMSEA financial sustainability                                                                   | Completed |

Legend:

Completed

Ongoing

Not Yet Started

4.12. The PRF identified four priority actions to strengthen SDS-SEA M&E implementation going forward. These include: strengthening the monitoring and reporting system; moving beyond project-driven approaches by developing institution-wide frameworks for capacity development, sustainable livelihoods, and gender mainstreaming to ensure consistency, scalability, and long-term results; deepening public-private partnerships and offering recognition mechanisms to mobilize investments, noting private sector engagement as a particular area of weakness requiring country partners' support at the regional level; and enhance knowledge management and strategic communications.

4.13. On Strategic Partnerships developed and/or strengthened

4.14. The ED reported PRF's participation in high-profile partnerships and co-hosting of major international events, including the launch of the East Asian Seas Regional Marine Protected Areas Collaborative Network with ATSEA, ASEAN Center for Biodiversity (ACB), IUCN, CTI-CFF, COBSEA NEAMPAN, IOC-WESTPAC, and the South China Sea project. The regional collaborative network collectively participated in the 10th Our Ocean Conference in Busan, RoKorea and the 3rd UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France to show its support to EAS countries in fulfilling its commitment to UN SDGs and 30x30 targets. PRF also collaborated with young leaders and early career network professionals at the Blue Wave Conference organized in Shenzhen China. Other 2025 highlights included the continued implementation of regional projects in countries and with partners, the successful

organization of the GEF SEC project oversight grant and training program in the EAS region, and the sharing of local solutions and best practices at the 2025 PNLG Forum.

4.15. On Future Outlook, Challenges and Strategic Milestones for 2026

4.16. Amid continuing global uncertainty, including geopolitical and trade tensions, climate change impacts, and reduced foreign direct investment, grants, and technical assistance, the PRF outlined its priorities for 2026, including ensuring a smooth PRF leadership transition, mobilizing technical and financial resources, approving the business development and resource mobilization plan, adopting the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol and its annexes on blue carbon ecosystems, continued engagement with the regional MPA network, scaling up and replicating pilot solutions, and mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion at both PRF and country level. It encouraged country partners to continue the spirit of voluntarism in hosting PEMSEA governance meetings and accomplishing monitoring and evaluation reporting on the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan to demonstrate the partnership's collective impact.

4.17. The Council Chair opened the floor for questions and comments.

4.18. **Discussion highlights:**

4.19. Mr. Akasio dos Santos of Timor-Leste moved to accept the Executive Director's report for 2025, noting the increase in projected revenues for 2026 and expressing hope that this growth would be sustained and translated into more concrete projects on the ground. Timor-Leste affirmed its commitment to the partnership through its Cost Sharing Agreement and MOU with PEMSEA, and its PEMSEA Coordinator based in Timor-Leste working closely with the PRF Secretariat to implement the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2030.

4.20. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore accepted the Executive Director's report and commended her leadership while sharing several key observations. He noted that characterizing PEMSEA's resource mobilization success as "remarkable" was an understatement, given the increase from US\$3.5 million to a projected US\$6.7 million (an approximately 90% increase) and looked forward to hearing more about related projects during the Technical Session. Mr. Singh welcomed the Unqualified Audited Financial Statement for 2025, as well as the timely mid-term review of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan, which serves as the basis for the 2027–2030 Implementation Plan. In doing so, he noted that the challenges identified are not unique to PEMSEA and supported efforts to scale up pilot projects. Furthermore,

he acknowledged the observations regarding fragmented governance in the Status, Trends and Transitions report while emphasizing the need for science-based, collaborative approaches. He expressed support for the seven focus areas in the 2023–2030 Strategy Map, the ten action items in the upcoming plan, and the Memoranda of Agreement signed with Indonesia, the Philippines, Viet Nam, and Malaysia on the IRBM project, alongside the participation of Timor-Leste—ASEAN's newest member—in the Marine Plastics Project. Finally, regarding gender equality and social inclusion, Singapore expressed support in principle while cautioning that implementation must remain practical and pragmatic to avoid operational challenges on the ground.

- 4.21. Mr. Nobuyuki Mori of Japan found the Executive Director's report useful for learning about other countries' initiatives and efforts and asked how the SDS-SEA report would be used going forward. Japan also noted that preparing its submission for the first reporting exercise was challenging, as the definitions of terms and scope of some reporting items in the questionnaire were not sufficiently clear. He requested that the PRF provide more detailed guidance, with concrete examples and sample answers, for future reporting exercises to facilitate consistency across country partners.
- 4.22. Ms. Chen Danhong of China congratulated the Executive Director, the PRF, and all partners on the outcomes achieved in 2025 and 2026 and agreed that PEMSEA should move beyond project-driven approaches to stay true to its founding mission as the regional coordinating mechanism for the SDS-SEA, by adopting up-to-date ICM approaches and building broader partnerships to help the East Asian Seas region remain healthy, resilient, and sustainable.
- 4.23. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea took note of PEMSEA's key achievements in 2025 and its plans for future operations. She expressed appreciation for the efforts of the PRF as reflected in the ED's report. RoKorea expressed hope for a smooth leadership transition following the appointment of the new ED and for the planned expansion in the number of country partners.
- 4.24. **Conclusion:** The Council welcomed the ED's report, commending PEMSEA's achievements in 2025 and expressing strong support for ongoing initiatives. Partners emphasized the importance of aligning future actions with global and regional priorities, strengthening national implementation, enhancing knowledge dissemination, and increasing engagement with local governments and stakeholders.

4.25. **Recommendations**, the PRF was urged to:

- sustain revenue growth by expanding support for local projects and strengthening Country Partner participation through the Cost Sharing Agreement (CSA) with PRF.
- continue the timely implementation of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan, regularly review and refine the Balanced Scorecard, and provide clearer guidance on its purpose, coverage, and reporting terminology to ensure consistency across Country Partners.
- adopt a practical approach to the implementation of Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI), strengthen PEMSEA's role as a regional mechanism by broadening Country Partner participation in its programs and initiatives; and,
- ensure a smooth transition to the incoming Executive Director while maintaining continuity in program implementation.

4.26. **Decision:** The ED's report was approved.



*Delegates gather at the 18th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting in Singapore on July 22-23, 2026.*

## **5. ELECTION OF THE COUNCIL CO-CHAIR AND OATH TAKING (PC/18/DOC/04)**

5.1. The Council Chair informed the Council that the Co-Chair position had remained vacant since the 17th EAS PC Meeting in July 2025. Following an extended call for nominations, the Ministry of Environment of Indonesia submitted a formal nomination on June 5, 2026, identifying Dr. Rasio Ridho Sani as candidate. As

communicated in the PRF's letter dated July 16, 2026, no objections were received by the designated deadline, confirming his election pursuant to the no-objection process per item 3.3 of PC/18/DOC/04.

- 5.2. The Council Chair acknowledged the engagement and affirmative response of Country Partners in the governance process and invited Executive Director Gonzales to formally present the results of the election process.
- 5.3. The ED presented the results of the election process and formally introduced Dr. Rasio Ridho Sani as the new EAS Partnership Council Co-Chair for the term July 31, 2026 – July 30, 2028.
- 5.4. The Council Chair administered the oath of office. Dr. Sani and was formally sworn in as EAS Partnership Council Co-Chair.
- 5.5. Dr. Sani delivered brief remarks upon taking his oath. He thanked the Council Chair, his fellow Executive Committee members, and all country and non-country partners for their trust and confidence. He conveyed his appreciation to the Government of Singapore and to Mr. Ranjeet Singh for hosting the meeting and expressed that he was deeply honored to serve as Co-Chair, aware of the responsibility the role carries. He noted that Indonesia, as the largest archipelagic country in the East Asian Seas region, understands firsthand what it means for coasts and oceans to be healthy, and what is lost when they are not. He looked forward to working closely with the Council Chair, the Executive Committee, the PRF, and all country and non-country partners to advance the partnership's goals, committing to serve as a bridge between countries, between science and policy action, and between PEMSEA's shared regional goals and international commitments and local needs. He announced that Indonesia will host the 2027 East Asian Seas Congress in October 2027, inviting all partners to the gathering, and closed by stating he was ready to serve.
- 5.6. The Council Chair congratulated Dr. Sani and thanked him for accepting the Council Co-Chair role.
- 5.7. **Decision:** The EAS PC noted the completion of the roster of EAS PC Officers and Co-Chairs for 2025-2028.

## **6. RESULTS OF THE SELECTION OF THE NEW PRF EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (PC/18/DOC/05)**

- 6.1. The Council Chair, in his capacity as Chair of the Selection Committee, presented the results and status of the recruitment process for the new PRF Executive Director for the term 2027 to 2029.
- 6.2. The Council Chair informed the Council that, following the approval of the Terms of Reference at the 17th EAS PC Meeting and the adoption of the revised recruitment schedule during the 35th EC Meeting, the vacancy announcement for the position of PRF ED for the 2027–2029 term was officially published on August 4, 2025, with the application period closing on March 30, 2026.
- 6.3. He explained that the international recruitment campaign attracted 79 applications, comprising 61 from outside and 18 from within the EAS region. The recruitment process was conducted through a structured three-stage approach consisting of: (i) a minimum criteria review, where candidates who did not meet the required qualifications were screened out; (ii) longlisting, during which a recruitment consultant endorsed nine qualified candidates to the Screening Committee; and (iii) shortlisting, where the Screening Committee evaluated candidates based on weighted scoring, geographical representation, gender balance, and overall suitability to PEMSEA's mandate, resulting in four finalists.
- 6.4. The Council Chair further reported that, on June 3, 2026, the Selection Committee, joined by the Council Co-Chairs as observers, supported by the PRF Human Resources Specialist and the incumbent ED, conducted virtual interviews with three shortlisted candidates. He added that the final candidate(s) would undergo professional background checks and reference interviews before the Selection Committee finalizes its recommendation and the PRF Secretariat proceeds with the formal hiring process.
- 6.5. The Council Chair opened the floor for questions and feedback.
- 6.6. **Discussion highlights:**
- 6.7. Mr. Yang Yafeng of China thanked the Selection Committee for its work in finding a suitable candidate for the PRF's next ED and requested more specific and regular updates on the next steps of the selection process so that member states and partners could follow the necessary procedures.

- 6.8. Mr. Aleixo Leonito Amaral of Timor-Leste acknowledged the process of recruiting the new ED and appreciated being kept informed of further developments in the recruitment process.
- 6.9. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore noted the good interest in the ED position, with a one-to-three ratio of candidates from within the region to those from beyond it, and expressed support for the incoming Executive Director's efforts to draw a larger pool of prospective candidates from the region in the future, building on the strong foundation established under the outgoing ED.
- 6.10. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea expressed hope that the most qualified candidate would be selected as the new ED and sought clarification on whether the selection would require approval by country partners.
- 6.11. PRF clarified that the Selection Committee, composed of PC Chairs (Council, IG and TS) will collectively decide on behalf of the Council. Country Partners' approval is not required for the appointment of the new Executive Director; however, their support and endorsement of the candidate chosen by the Selection Committee would be welcomed.
- 6.12. **Recommendation:** PRF Secretariat to provide PC with a detailed timeline of the ED recruitment process and communicate next steps in a timely manner. (*PRF note: The timeline of the ED recruitment process was provided to the Intergovernmental Session on July 23, 2026. See Annex 3 - Main Presentation, p.224*)
- 6.13. **Decision:** The results of the selection process were noted.

## **7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS — PNLG AND PNLC WORK PLANS 2026–2027 (PC/18/DOC/06)**

- 7.1. The Council Chair introduced the agenda items under Any Other Business, namely the presentations on the Work Plans of the PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) and the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC) for 2026–2027. While their respective charters do not mandate them to report to the Council, they willingly shared their plans in the spirit of collaboration and partnership, as these networks play an essential role in operationalizing the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023–2030.

## 7.2. PNLG Work Plan 2026-2027

- 7.3. Dr. Fang Qinhua, Deputy Secretary General of the PNLG Secretariat, presented the PNLG Work Plan 2026–2027. He reported that the PNLG Executive Committee held its 17th meeting virtually in April 2026 and discussed the program and preparations for the upcoming annual PNLG Forum in Busan which includes a Joint PNLG-PNLC learning event in RoKorea on September 8-10, 2026. They also reviewed strategies for recruiting new members, and mechanisms to strengthen current member engagement.
- 7.4. Dr. Fang also informed the body that the 2027 PNLG Forum will be one of the key events in the 2027 East Asian Seas Congress. On attracting new members, he reported a formal application from Atauro Island, Timor-Leste which was recommended for approval by the PNLG Secretariat based in Xiamen. Atauro is expected to sign the PNLG Charter at the Busan Forum, which would bring total membership to 60 (55 regular and 5 associate members). The province of Pampanga, Philippines is also in active dialogue with the PNLG secretariat and will likely file its membership application late this year.
- 7.5. He highlighted PNLG's core objective to expand local government membership, further cementing the network's unique position in advancing sustainable coastal development across East Asian Seas. Emphasizing that capacity building remains central to its mission, Dr. Fang highlighted two major initiatives planned for the year:
- The 2026 World Ocean Week in Xiamen (November 5–11, 2026), the PNLG Secretariat and Coastal and Ocean Management Institute (COMI), Xiamen University will convene the East Asian Youth Exchange on Marine Biodiversity Conservation, fully supported by the Xiamen Municipal Government. Centered on the theme "Youth Action for Marine Biodiversity," the program will engage university students from member countries through academic exchanges and field activities to build future leadership in marine conservation and integrated coastal management.
  - The Secretariat is assisting Jakarta Province, Indonesia, in hosting a Blue Carbon Workshop for coastal cities in the second half of the year. The workshop will focus on embedding nature-based solutions, specifically mangrove restoration, into urban climate frameworks to strengthen local climate resilience.
- 7.6. Dr. Fang reaffirmed the PNLG Secretariat under the Xiamen Municipal Bureau's dedication to facilitating strong governance, executing high-impact programs, expanding regional reach, and empowering members through tailored capacity building, encouraging delegates to contact the team for further details.

#### 7.7. PNLC Work Plan 2026-2027

- 7.8. Dr. Yonvitner, President of the PNLC, presented the PNLC Work Plan 2026–2027. He highlighted the network's expanding regional footprint and strategic achievements. The PNLC currently connects 25 academic and research institutions, including 21 universities and 4 designated Centers of Excellence, spanning 9 countries. To complete its regional representation, the network is actively finalizing membership agreements with Mokpo National University in the Republic of Korea and the Institute of Oceanography at Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT).
- 7.9. The PNLC's operational strategy is structured around four main pillars: governance, capacity-building programs, knowledge exchange, and resource mobilization. A central element of this framework is its strong strategic alignment with the PNLC, ensuring that academic expertise directly supports local government needs. By combining tools, methodologies, and technical instruments across member institutions, the PNLC continues to contribute directly to PEMSEA's centralized SeaKnowledgeBank while its members work in specialized working groups to tackle marine pollution, climate adaptation, blue carbon, and Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM).
- 7.10. In addition to hosting joint international seminars and technical workshops, the PNLC is invested in regional talent development. The network has rolled out youth internship programs and leadership initiatives in Manila and at Thailand's Burapha University. Notably, its recent blue carbon training program was conducted with technical support from the University of Hawaii at Mānoa.
- 7.11. Dr. Yonvitner concluded by reiterating the need for sustained multi-country backing to scale up research funding and capacity-building activities, following which the Chair opened the floor for intervention and feedback on the presented work plans.
- 7.12. **Discussion highlights:**
- 7.13. Mr. Yang Yafeng of China thanked Dr. Fang and Dr. Yonvitner for their reports, noting that PNLC and PNLC are important mechanisms for promoting local government and stakeholder involvement in implementing the SDS-SEA and raising PEMSEA's regional profile. China reaffirmed its strong support for its members' participation in both mechanisms and requested that the PRF Secretariat continue to give greater consideration to PNLC and PNLC members when designing future work plans and projects, to deepen local government and stakeholder involvement and help access additional local funding.
- 7.14. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea invited partners to participate in the PNLC Forum in Busan in September 2026 and expressed hope that the said Forum would provide a meaningful platform for strengthening solidarity among local governments across country partners.

- 7.15. Dr. Nguyen My Hang of Viet Nam affirmed that the PNLG is an important and meaningful mechanism and asked for more specific information on the 2026-2027 work plan, including whether there are plans to extend the network and how country partners could help select and engage new members.
- 7.16. Mr. Sayid Muhadhar of Indonesia commended the PNLG as a vital and meaningful mechanism for regional collaboration. To support the network's implementation, he requested further details on specific activity deliverables. Looking beyond the 2026–2027 work plans, he asked about long-term strategy and sought clarification on the process for expanding the network, specifically asking how country partners can collaboratively identify and select prospective members to expand the network.
- 7.17. Ms. Keodokmay Phouipaseuth of Lao PDR requested that its local government officers be included in training on water resource management, citing existing project experience in three provinces, and proposed that the PNLG and PNLC extend capacity-building support on water resource management to Lao PDR's local governments.
- 7.18. Responding to Viet Nam's query on behalf of the PNLG Secretariat, Dr. Fang confirmed that the 2027 PNLG work plan will continue to feature the Executive Committee meeting, the annual forum, and ongoing capacity-building activities. Additionally, he reiterated that interested local governments across the region are welcome to apply for network membership, inviting country focal points to submit recommendations to the PNLG Secretariat for review.
- 7.19. **Recommendations:**
- Country Partners are encouraged to recommend interested local governments to contact the PNLG Secretariat to begin the membership application process.
  - PNLG Secretariat to provide Viet Nam with more detailed information on PNLG activities and membership expansion plans upon its request.
  - PNLG and PNLC, working with PRF to explore capacity building opportunities for Lao PDR local governments on water resource management.
- 7.20. **Decision:** The Work Plans of the PNLG and PNLC for 2026–2027 were duly noted.

## **8. CLOSING OF THE COUNCIL SESSION**

- 8.1. With no further matters tabled for discussion, the Council Chair declared the Council Session officially closed at 11:08 AM.

## TECHNICAL SESSION

### 9. OPENING OF THE TECHNICAL SESSION (TS) AND ADOPTION OF THE TS AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/07)

- 9.1. Ms. April Tigulo, PRF Secretariat Coordinator, welcomed participants back to the afternoon Technical Session of the 18th EAS PC Meeting and called on the TS Chair, Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon, to open the session.
- 9.2. Dr. Kwon opened the TS, welcoming CPs, NCPs, colleagues, and friends. Dr. Kwon also introduced Dr. Kazumi Wakita as Co-Chair, who would preside over the second part of the session.
- 9.3. Dr. Kwon then invited Ms. Tigulo to present the provisional TS agenda.
- 9.4. Ms. Tigulo presented five agenda items:
- Agenda 8 - Updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program and launch of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol (RBCAP) (For approval and recommendations);
  - Agenda 9 - 2027 East Asian Seas Congress Updates (For notation);
  - Agenda 10 - Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in the East Asian Seas Report (For review and approval);
  - Agenda 11 - PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program (For approval and recommendations);
  - Agenda 12 - PRF Project Updates (For comments and information); and
  - Agenda 13 - Other Business.
- 9.5. PRF ED Aimee Gonzales informed the body that the ED of the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), an NCP, had to leave for his flight to Manila and proposed switching Agenda Items 11 and 12 so that the PRF Project Updates would be taken up before the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program.
- 9.6. Dr. Kwon opened the floor for comments or suggested revisions to the agenda. Hearing none, the agenda was adopted as amended.
- 9.7. **Conclusion:** The TS agenda, amended to move Agenda Item 12 (PRF Project Updates) ahead of Agenda Item 11 (PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program), was adopted without objection.
- 9.8. **Decision:** The agenda of the Technical Session was adopted.

## 10. UPDATES ON THE PEMSEA BLUE CARBON PROGRAM AND LAUNCH OF THE REGIONAL BLUE CARBON ACCOUNTING PROTOCOL (PC/18/DOC/08)

- 10.1. Dr. Kwon introduced Agenda Item 8 and invited Ms. Gonzales and Ms. Kristina Ticman, PEMSEA Blue Carbon Specialist, to present the agenda.
- 10.2. Ms. Gonzales presented the background of the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program. PEMSEA's blue carbon work started in 2017 with the development of landscape assessment of blue carbon ecosystems and exploring partnerships with other organizations looking into blue carbon development in the region. However, the formal Blue Carbon Program began in 2023 when PC agreed to have a harmonized and coordinated approach to blue carbon management with a view to supporting country partners' commitment in securing their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and strengthening coastal resilience, based on a blue carbon roadmap addressing supply, demand, and measurement/certification.
- 10.3. In 2025, PEMSEA established a Blue Carbon Technical Working Group (TWG), to guide the development of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol (RBCAP). The main RBCAP report was finalized and adopted in principle, and ecosystem-specific annexes for mangrove, seagrass, and salt marsh were added. The TWG's chairship also transferred from then TS Chair Dr. Keita Furukawa to the current TS Chair Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon.

| Year/<br>Action<br>s | Supply                                       | Demand                                     | Measuring &<br>Monitoring                                           | Training &<br>Capacity<br>Development             | Strategic<br>Guidance/<br>Fundraising |
|----------------------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2023                 | Assessment of BC Supply in EAS region report | Assessment of market demand briefing paper | Review of BC accounting protocol in 8 countries                     |                                                   | Core BC group convened                |
| 2024                 | Dissemination of results of the report       | PEMSEA certification structure             | Development of RBCAP & annexes on mangroves, tidal flats & seagrass | EAS Congress BC seminar                           | Creation of BC TWG                    |
| 2025                 | Discussion of results at PNLG Forum 2025     |                                            | Development of annexes on mangroves,                                | Hainan BC forum<br><br>PNLC Chonburi Training and | Development of BluePASS concept note  |

| Year/<br>Action<br>s | Supply | Demand                           | Measuring &<br>Monitoring                                                                                                    | Training &<br>Capacity<br>Development                                                                       | Strategic<br>Guidance/<br>Fundraising                                                              |
|----------------------|--------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                      |        |                                  | seagrass & tidal flats                                                                                                       | Capacity Development                                                                                        |                                                                                                    |
| 2026                 |        | Refine PEMSEA certification plan | Biodiversity Crediting Guideline<br><br>Development of training manual<br><br>Pilot testing RBCAP<br><br>Explore BC registry | PNLC Regional Blue Carbon Workshop<br><br>ROK BC Global Forum<br><br>Hainan BC forum<br><br>PNLC Forum 2026 | Endorsement of BluePASS concept proposal by CPs & NCPs<br><br>Regional State of Blue Carbon report |

- 10.4. The ED presented other elements of the road map such as a market demand assessment and briefing paper; review of blue carbon accounting protocols in eight countries, including Thailand; development of a biodiversity crediting guideline by consultant Dr. Severino Salmo; a training manual and pilot testing of RBCAP, including in Dongying, China; a concept note on the Blue Carbon and Biodiversity Certification for People, Adaptation, and Sustainable East Asian Seas (BluePASS Project) proposal seeking country and non-country partner endorsement for submission to the GEF 9 replenishment fund; and an annotated outline for a Regional State of Blue Carbon report, for which country experts were invited to volunteer as contributors.
- 10.5. Ms. Cristina Ticman introduced RBCAP's technical features, noting that its methods were not new, but were consolidated documentation of existing approaches developed and tested by PEMSEA country partners, research, and international standards. RBCAP was created in 2024 with the review of national protocols and experiences from China, Indonesia, RoKorea, the Philippines, and Thailand, together with international systems such as VERRA and Japan's J-Blue Credit System and was refined through the BC TWG process in 2025.
- 10.6. Ms. Ticman explained RBCAP's tiered-methods approach, allowing institutions with differing levels of data, laboratory, staff, and financial capacity to apply the protocol at an appropriate and transparent level of accuracy. The RBCAP package consists of one main methodology document (covering project scope, eligibility,

boundaries, baseline conditions, leakage, permanence, uncertainty, and monitoring/verification/reporting) and five technical annexes: mangrove, seagrass, salt marsh, ecosystem mapping, and environmental parameters.

- 10.7. She highlighted that while RBCAP establishes the technical foundation, its true impact hinges on effective implementation. The journey begins with translating these complex methods into actionable training manuals, practical learning modules, and hands-on exercises.
- 10.8. To ensure that these tools hold up under actual field conditions, selected pilot sites will test the core methods, templates, and site readiness requirements. This piloting phase serves a crucial diagnostic purpose: revealing which instructions are clear, highlighting areas that need refinement, and pinpointing where partners require extra support.
- 10.9. Most importantly, she emphasized that the goal is not to force every institution to adopt the most advanced methods right away. Its measure of success would be in enabling countries to start by applying tools and methods that match their current capacity, reporting the results in a transparent manner and upgrading their systems over time. Ultimately, the RBCAP offers the region a common language for blue carbon accounting. Rather than discarding existing practices, it brings diverse local methods and experiences together into a single, cohesive system that everyone can follow.
- 10.10. **Discussion highlights:**
- 10.11. Director Al Orolfo of the Philippines commended Dr. Kwon, Chair of the TWG, along with the team behind the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program, for the successful launch of the RBCAP. He emphasized that the protocol represents a milestone contribution toward the conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of regional blue carbon ecosystems. Furthermore, he highlighted its role as an essential tool for standardizing carbon accounting practices and providing a credible framework to drive future blue carbon market development.
- 10.12. Mr. Nobuyuki Mori of Japan raised a technical point regarding the main text. Focusing on Section 3.2.1 ("Location and Spatial Species," page 10), he noted that the text currently restricts eligible project locations to subtropical or temperate regions. He pointed out that parts of northern Japan are classified as sub-Arctic under the Köppen Climate Classification System, yet still support vital blue carbon habitats, including seagrasses and key seaweed species like wakame and kelp.

Mr. Mori also requested clarification on whether sub-Arctic ecosystems are intentionally excluded from the protocol's scope.

- 10.13. Dr. Samantha Lai of Singapore commended the drafting team for the substantial effort dedicated to crafting the protocol. She praised the comprehensive nature of the annexes, emphasizing that their grounding in proven scientific research and industry best practices ensures a high standard of technical rigor. Reaffirming Singapore's support for this robust approach, Dr. Lai noted that the delegation would be submitting a set of detailed technical comments in writing to the PRF Secretariat for further review.
- 10.14. Dr. Wang Yuxing of the National Marine Hazard Mitigation Service (NMHMS), P.R. China outlined three key considerations for the draft document. First, she suggested changing the document's title from "Protocol" to "Guidance." Since the document serves as a non-binding framework, framing it as guidance would make it more approachable and promote wider uptake among country partners. Second, she stressed the need for flexibility, allowing countries to harmonize the framework with their existing national standards while refining the methods through practical pilot implementation. Finally, she advised removing aquaculture-related sections from the document. She pointed out that the carbon-sink mechanisms for shellfish aquaculture remain unclear and lack broad international recognition. She added that while concepts like microalgae and eco-culture are mentioned, the text currently lacks the necessary monitoring and quantification methods to support them credibly.
- 10.15. Ms. Jinsol Choi expressed RoKorea's overall support for the RBCAP but pointed out that the IPCC Task Force on National Greenhouse Gas Inventories is currently revising the 2013 Wetlands Supplement, with publication slated for late 2027 and proposed that subsequent updates to the regional protocol may be necessary to maintain alignment with evolving global standards. Furthermore, Ms. Choi advocated for continued regional dialogue to ensure that tidal flats and seaweed (for which East Asia leads global production and consumption) are recognized as key blue carbon sinks and ultimately integrated into national greenhouse gas inventories. She added that RoKorea would submit detailed feedback in writing.
- 10.16. Mr. Masanori Kobayashi of Ocean Policy Research Institute (OPRI) commended the PRF Secretariat for producing and disseminating the draft protocol, reaffirming that blue carbon remains a top priority for the region. Aligning with the interventions from Japan and RoKorea, OPRI urged for due consideration of East Asia's diverse coastal ecosystems, including seagrass beds, wild and farmed seaweeds,

mangroves, salt marshes, and tidal flats. Additionally, OPRI emphasized that protocol implementation should account for the broader biological, ecological, and socio-economic benefits generated by blue carbon restoration and conservation. Citing insights from the recent Global Nature Positive Summit in Kumamoto, Japan, OPRI reaffirmed its commitment to advancing regional action on coastal ecosystem preservation.

- 10.17. Mr. Jerome Montemayor of ACB noted that peatlands were not included in RBCAP and offered to share the outputs of ACB's EnCORE Wetlands Project (Enhancing Conservation and Restoration of Wetlands and Peatlands in ASEAN as Effective Sinks and Reservoirs of Greenhouse Gases) funded by the ASEAN-UK GTF, which is producing carbon stock and emissions data for peatlands in Asia, as a possible supplemental annex. He also offered to have ACB host a coordination meeting between its team and PRF's consultants.
- 10.18. Dr. Linlin Zhao of P.R. China expressed appreciation for PEMSEA's blue carbon efforts and committed China to providing written feedback on the RBCAP report and its annexes and its designated contact and expert to support the drafting of the Regional Blue Carbon report.
- 10.19. Dr. Wang Yuxing of the NMHMS, P.R. China presented China's multi-tiered approach to advancing blue carbon science, policy, and market mechanisms. At the macro level, she highlighted a new national pilot work plan launched by the Ministry of Natural Resources that focuses on monitoring, accounting, climate action, and ecological restoration across mangroves, salt marshes, tidal flats, seagrass, macroalgae, and marine aquaculture. Taking Fujian Province as a primary example, China is actively aligning local accounting with carbon trading platforms to create a closed-loop market model. Internationally, China has deepened cooperation through high-level dialogues and joint publications in Fuzhou and Haikou. Turning to practical implementation, she detailed the progress of China's flagship "full-chain" pilot project in Dongying City, located in the Yellow River Delta. The initiative has established a complete operational model: mapping coastal carbon sinks, generating high-precision datasets, establishing field monitoring stations, and initiating pilot carbon trades. Notably, monitoring in 2025 recorded an annual sink increase of 142 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, while ecological restoration efforts successfully achieved over 50% wave attenuation during storm surges. Public awareness is supported by a dedicated exhibition hall and dozens of media outreach channels. Looking ahead, she proposed a structured outline for an East Asian Seas Regional Blue Carbon Report to aggregate policy, scientific, and capacity-building progress across PEMSEA member states.

- 10.20. Following the presentation, the TS Chair expressed strong appreciation for China's extensive field data, suggesting that PEMSEA explore building a centralized regional database to house incoming research and project results.
- 10.21. Dr. Yeajin Jung presented key milestones from the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI), highlighting its contributions to the implementation of the SDS-SEA, particularly in the area of blue carbon. She reported that KMI had contributed to the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Technical Working Group's development of the Harmonizing Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol for Coastal Ecosystems in the East Asian Seas Region. She noted that KMI had participated in the Working Group's discussions on the salt marsh accounting annex, sharing relevant data and providing scientific input to support the refinement of the methodology. She also further reported that KMI had hosted the 2026 Blue Carbon International Seminar in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 23 to 24 April 2026, with the participation of the Chair of the PEMSEA Blue Carbon TWG and members of the Blue Carbon Working Group committees. The seminar had provided a platform for regional exchange on blue carbon policy and science.
- 10.22. Dr. Jung also informed the body that KMI had been working jointly with the World Bank on a report titled "Unlocking Blue Carbon in Korea: Policy and Scientific Foundations for Carbon Market Integration," completed in April 2026. She explained that the report examined the structural barriers to integrating blue carbon into the RoK's Emissions Trading Scheme, including the absence of an approved methodology, unresolved questions on marine carbon ownership, and current carbon pricing limitations, and proposed a roadmap to address these barriers for the first time in the country. She concluded that these efforts reflected KMI's continued commitment to strengthening the scientific and policy foundations for blue carbon under the SDS-SEA framework, and to supporting regional cooperation through PEMSEA.
- 10.23. Ms. Yumi Son of IUCN welcomed progress on RBCAP and expressed IUCN's support for harmonized regional methodologies complementary to global frameworks, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and noted synergies with IUCN's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Phase 2 project.
- 10.24. Mr. Takahiro Yamazaki of Japan shared that Japan's J-Blue blue carbon credit scheme was referenced in RBCAP's development, and that Japan has developed a drone-based system using green lasers to map seagrass and seaweed beds, to be fully operational from August 2026.

- 10.25. Mr. Yoppy Tan of Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL), Singapore highlighted the connection between blue carbon ecosystem protection and marine pollution preparedness, recommending that environmental priorities for sensitive ecosystems such as mangroves and seagrass be integrated into national oil spill contingency plans and response decision-making.
- 10.26. Dr. Nguyen My Hang of Viet Nam welcomed the report and requested that the scale of PEMSEA's blue carbon activities be indicated in the forthcoming Regional State of Blue Carbon report. She offered Viet Nam's mangrove forests as a potential pilot site and shared that Viet Nam is the third country globally, after Indonesia and the Philippines, to establish a national blue carbon action partnership program.
- 10.27. Responding to the interventions, the ED thanked the delegates for their strong support and constructive recommendations. Regarding calls from Japan, RoKorea, China, OPRI, and the ACB to expand the protocol to additional ecosystems, such as seaweeds, kelp, tidal flats, aquaculture, microalgae, and peatlands, she emphasized that the RBCAP is designed as a living document. While the immediate focus is securing approval for the main text and its initial three annexes (mangroves, seagrasses, and salt marshes/tidal flats), the PRF is fully open to developing new annexes. However, she requested country and non-country partners to contribute expert volunteers, research data, or co-financing for the additional annexes and tasks suggested. The PRF Secretariat will reach out to individual country partners to discuss tailored pathways for collaboration.
- 10.28. Addressing China's suggestion to rename the framework from a "Protocol" to "Guidance," the ED left the final decision to the body, noting that regardless of the title, the document is inherently meant to function as a guiding framework. On the topic of ecological co-benefits raised by OPRI, she shared that consultant Dr. Severino Salmo is actively progressing on a biodiversity crediting framework. Once reviewed by the Blue Carbon TWG, his work will be presented in the next TS.
- 10.29. In response to ROK's intervention, the ED informed that PRF closely monitors IPCC developments to ensure that the RBCAP remains consistent and aligned with evolving global standards.

- 10.30. She concluded by encouraging TS to join and/or nominate experts to join the Blue Carbon TWG, share scientific literature, suggest partner organizations, or contribute technical knowledge on additional annexes to RBCAP and financial resources to ensure the program's long-term sustainability.
- 10.31. **Conclusion:** The TS expressed strong support and appreciation for the progress of the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program, welcomed the range of technical inputs, additional ecosystem proposals, and offers of collaboration from CPs and NCPs, and noted the request for country-specific comments to be submitted in writing by end of August 2026.
- 10.32. **Recommendations:**
- CPs are encouraged to volunteer to prepare additional ecosystem annexes, provide funding support for consultants to draft additional ecosystem annexes, and nominate relevant experts to join the Blue Carbon TWG.
  - PRF Secretariat to establish a PEMSEA platform and database of blue carbon research and efforts across the region.
  - PRF to engage CPs individually regarding contributions to additional RBCAP annexes (funding, experts, research materials, or joining the TWG).
  - ACB and BC TWG to schedule a meeting on peatland inclusion in the RBCAP.
  - PRF Secretariat to monitor IPCC guidelines revision and ensure alignment of RBCAP with updated global standards upon publication (expected 2027).
- 10.33. **Decision:** The RBCAP is hereby approved as a living document. Additional ecosystem annexes are welcome. Deadline for inputs and comments on the RBCAP and annexes: August 31, 2026.

## **11. 2027 EAST ASIAN SEAS CONGRESS UPDATES (PC/18/DOC/09)**

- 11.1. Dr. Kwon introduced Agenda Item 9 and invited Mr. Sayid Muhadhar, Director of Coastal and Marine Pollution and Damage Control, Indonesia to present the latest updates on the 2027 East Asian Seas Congress preparations, to be held in October 2027 in Indonesia.
- 11.2. Mr. Muhadhar presented the progress in preparing for EAS Congress 2027. He confirmed that Indonesia's Minister of Environment had agreed for Indonesia to serve as host country and presented two tentative venue options in the greater Jakarta area, the Tangerang Regency: the Nusantara International Convention Exhibition and the BSD City venue which was previously used for hosting the

Global Sustainable Development Congress. He also presented tentative field-trip sites at Ketapang, the site of a mangrove planting activity during the PNLG Forum in 2022 and Pulau Seribu, the Thousand Islands, which feature mangrove and coral reef ecosystem management and restoration.

11.3. **Discussion highlights:**

- 11.4. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore thanked Indonesia for hosting the 2027 Congress and offered Singapore's support, including in its capacity as incoming ASEAN Chair, to explore synergies for a successful event.
- 11.5. Ms. Chen Danhong, of China recognized Indonesia's constructive role in PEMSEA, PNLG, and PNLC, and confirmed China's support for Indonesia's hosting of the Congress and its intention to include the event in China's 2027 work plan. She requested that China's national holiday during the first week of October be considered when scheduling and expressed a preference for the Congress theme focused on accelerating actions on 2030 targets.
- 11.6. Mr. Jerome Montemayor of ACB expressed the organization's interest in attending and participating in the 2027 Congress, noting it would provide a platform to showcase outputs of the ASEAN ENMAPS project.
- 11.7. Mr. Aleixo Leonito Amaral of Timor-Leste sought clarification on the timeline for deciding the Congress theme.
- 11.8. The PRF ED clarified that no decision on the theme has been made, that ideas would continue to be floated and agreed together with Indonesia, and that members would be informed in due course. She confirmed the Congress would be held in October 2027, with the specific week still to be finalized, noting that the first week of October coincides with China's national holiday.
- 11.9. Dr. Rasio Sani, EAS PC Council Co-Chair, relayed discussions held with Mr. Mahesh Pradhan of COBSEA on using the 2027 Congress as an opportunity to explore stronger collaboration, or a unified governance approach, between PEMSEA and COBSEA.
- 11.10. **Conclusion:** The Council welcomed Indonesia's progress report on preparations for the 2027 EAS Congress and the expressions of support from CPs and NCPs, noting that venue, theme, and schedule details remain to be finalized in consultation with the host country.

11.11. **Recommendations**, the PRF was urged to:

- communicate the Congress theme development process and timeline to CPs and NCPs.
- note China's National Golden Week holiday falls on October 1–7, 2027 and take this into consideration in determining Congress dates.
- engage COBSEA and other regional organizations on joint participation and unified governance discussions at the 2027 Congress.

11.12. **Decision:** The 2027 EAS Congress updates were noted with appreciation to Indonesia.

## **12. MARINE PROTECTED AREAS IN THE EAST ASIAN SEAS REPORT (PC/18/DOC/10)**

12.1. The ED presented the Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the EAS Report, explaining that the EAS Regional Collaborative Network of MPAs was formed by nine regional organizations, building on discussions that started at the 2024 East Asian Seas Congress in Xiamen, presented at the 10th Our Ocean Conference in Busan, and shared at UN Ocean Conference 3 in Nice, France, in 2025. She reported that the baseline MPA report, funded by PEMSEA and the UNEP/GEF South China Sea Strategic Action Plan project, was a collaborative initiative among the nine regional organizations led by PEMSEA and developed by consultants from the UP Marine Environment Research Foundation (MERF). Its objective is to assist countries in achieving the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework's 30-by-30 targets. The report covers 15 countries including DPRK, Thailand, and Malaysia, with Lao PDR excluded as landlocked, based on data collected between May and December of the previous year.

12.2. The ED summarized the report's findings, noting significant expansion of MPA coverage at the country level, strong policy and legal frameworks, and active regional partnerships including ACB's ENMAPS project, alongside continuing challenges such as management effectiveness, limited connectivity between MPAs, financial constraints, and governance fragmentation. Key recommendations include adopting a seascape approach, aligning regional initiatives including OECM definitions, promoting integrated governance tools such as ICM, marine spatial planning, and ecosystem-based fisheries management, and mobilizing sustainable financing through mechanisms such as the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Fund and the Blue Action Fund. She clarified that the report is a technical resource owned by the nine regional organizations rather than by

individual countries and sought country partners' review and validation of their country profiles by August 31, 2026, while thanking those who have submitted their corrections and recommendations.

**12.3. Discussion highlights:**

- 12.4. Mr. Jerome Montemayor of ACB expressed strong support for the report as an evidence-based roadmap to accelerate 30-by-30 commitments, noting its complementarity with the ASEAN ENMAPS project and its contribution to the forthcoming fourth ASEAN Biodiversity Outlook.
- 12.5. Mr. Mahesh Pradhan of COBSEA and UNEP highlighted the momentum of the nine-organization Regional Collaborative Network, ongoing engagement with the GEF's ninth replenishment cycle, the upcoming first Asia-Pacific Ocean Week in Bangkok in October 2026, the COBSEA intergovernmental meeting to be hosted by the Philippines in November 2026, and the significance of the RoKorea hosting the 2028 UN Ocean Conference.
- 12.6. Mr. Aleixo Leonito Amaral of Timor-Leste expressed general support for the report, noting Timor-Leste's participation in the Coral Triangle Initiative (CTI) and its CTI-MPA network, and the need to harmonize regional MPA programs to avoid overlap.
- 12.7. Dr. Linlin Zhao of P.R. China appreciated the report and China's contribution of its national MPA profile, but flagged that some content, such as the depiction of Exclusive Economic Zone areas, may cause unnecessary sensitivities. He requested efforts to minimize conflicting elements and that the PRF Secretariat collect feedback from all countries after the meeting.
- 12.8. Mr. Yinfeng Guo of NMHMS, P.R. China, joining online, welcomed the MPA initiative and its alignment with the 30-by-30 target but questioned the report's promotion of a seascape approach, seeking clarification on how it relates to PEMSEA's established Integrated Coastal Management framework and existing GEF-funded Large Marine Ecosystem projects. He recommended that the report build on existing Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) evolving from Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis (TDA) and Strategic Action Programme (SAP) supported by the GEF in the past three decades rather than introduce a new approach.
- 12.9. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea reported that they had submitted a revised country profile with corrections concerning OECM listings, population data, and MPA designations, and shared that Korea recently designated a large offshore marine

protected area covering over one thousand square kilometers, with plans to begin pilot registration of marine OECMs.

- 12.10. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore noted that Singapore would submit written corrections to its country profile and reserved further comments pending clarification on the seascape and ICM approach.
- 12.11. Dir. Al Orolfo of the Philippines noted that the Philippines would undertake its own technical review and validation of the report's data before providing its concurrence.
- 12.12. Ms. Yumi Son of IUCN congratulated PEMSEA and partners on the report, welcomed its promotion of the IUCN Green List standard for protected area management effectiveness and its recognition of OECMs, and highlighted synergies with IUCN's Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Phase 2 project work on marine managed areas, management effectiveness, and ecosystem-based management at the seascape level.
- 12.13. In response to Mr. Yinfeng Guo, the ED and Ms. Nancy Bermas, PRF IRBM Project Manager, clarified that the seascape approach is not intended to replace ICM but to complement it, citing the Ticao-Burias Pass Protected Seascape in the Philippines, spanning four provinces and around 81 municipalities, as an example of integrating ICM, land-use planning, ecosystem-based fisheries management, and marine spatial planning under the ASEAN ENMAPS project. They noted that examples using the LME approach are included in Sections 6 and 7 of the report.
- 12.14. Mr. Yinfeng Guo reiterated his recommendation that the report draw on existing GEF-funded LME approach and institutional frameworks, such as those for the Arafura-Timor Seas, South China Sea, Gulf of Thailand, Indonesian Seas, and Sulu-Sulawesi Sea, rather than developing new mechanisms, for cost-effectiveness, enhanced biophysical connectivity of MPAs and joint actions, and coherence with existing global support.
- 12.15. Dr. Kwon then noted that the MPA Report was substantively approved, with a suggestion that country-specific corrections be submitted in writing by end August 2026.
- 12.16. **Conclusion:** The Council expressed broad support and appreciation for the Marine Protected Areas in the EAS Report as a technical resource, while noting requests from several CPs and NCPs for further technical clarification, and for country-specific corrections to be submitted in writing by August 31, 2026.

12.17. **Recommendations**, the PRF was urged to:

- coordinate bilateral discussions with countries on MPA report country profiles and submit an updated report ahead of the 36th Expanded Executive Committee (EEC) Meeting in October 2026.
- clarify terminology, consider 'ecosystem-based approach' rather than 'seascape approach' per NMHMS suggestion.
- add value to MPA quality by enhancing ecological connectivity and networking of existing regional collaborative frameworks such as ATSEA and CTI, among others in the MPA report and coherence of MPA e country profiles with regional frameworks. *(Secretariat note: the MPA report is a product of regional bodies which operate in specific LME or groups of LMEs whose LME approaches are already documented in the MPA report; this recommendation is noted for further emphasis in the updated version.)*

12.18. **Decision:** The Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report is approved in principle, but final endorsement of the baseline report will proceed according to the following review process:

- Country partners to submit comments and revisions by August 31, 2026;
- PRF to incorporate corrections by September 15, 2026, and send to PC for review;
- 36th EEC to endorse the MPA baseline report by 36th EEC by the third or last week of October 2026.

### 13. PRF PROJECT UPDATES (PC/18/DOC/12)

13.1. Dr. Kazumi Wakita assumed the role of presiding officer for the second part of the TS and invited Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager for the IRBM Project, to present PRF Project Updates under Agenda Item 12.

13.2. Implementing Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) in East Asia under a Source-to-Sea (S2S) System

13.3. *Introduction and Conceptual Framework*

13.4. Ms. Bermas began by establishing the conceptual foundation of the initiative. She noted that while stakeholder organizations across the region have long been accustomed to terms like "ridge-to-reef" or "hilltop-to-ocean," the Source-to-Sea (S2S) framework, first formally conceptualized by the GEF Scientific and Technical

Advisory Panel (STAP) in 2016, has now become the primary overarching framework for all GEF International Waters projects.

- 13.5. The S2S approach maps out an interconnected continuum across six segments: land systems, freshwater systems, estuaries and deltas, coastlines and nearshore areas, adjoining seas and continental shelves, and the open ocean. Running through these segments are six vital flows: water, biota, sediment, pollutants, materials, and ecosystem services. Ms. Bermas highlighted that alterations in water flows, driven by climate change, water extraction, and other human interventions, inevitably alter all downstream flows across the system.
- 13.6. To operationalize this approach, the project uses the river basin as a practical functional unit to delineate boundaries and target critical pollution, sedimentation, and degradation hotspots. She shared that the project's application of the S2S model at the basin level was recently featured as a primary case study in an International Waters Learning and Exchange Resource Network (IW:LEARN) publication.
- 13.7. *Governance, Scope, and Timeline*
- 13.8. The initiative represents a major inter-agency effort funded by the GEF with an US\$8.48 million grant alongside US\$106.98 million in leveraged co-financing. Implemented by the UNDP through its Bangkok Regional Hub, the project is executed regionally by the PRF.
- 13.9. Six ASEAN Member States: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Viet Nam, are actively participating in the project. Strategic regional governance is provided by the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management, with representatives from all 11 ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat serving on the Regional Steering Committee (RSC).
- 13.10. Ms. Bermas outlined the spatial scale of the project, which encompasses 7 target river basins across the 6 countries, covering roughly 32,008 hectares and directly affecting the lives of over 17 million people. These river systems drain into four large marine ecosystems: the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indonesian Seas.
- 13.11. Regarding the project timeline, while originally scheduled to run from January 2023 through December 2027, the RSC provisionally endorsed a 12-month no-cost

extension during its July 8, 2026 meeting. This endorsement officially extends implementation activities through December 2028.

13.12. *Strategic Components and Country Pilot Action*

13.13. The project operates across three core interconnected components designed to drive governance, field implementation, and institutional learning:

- Component 1 (State of the River Basin Reporting): Focuses on establishing comprehensive baseline profiles using 18 governance indicators and 14 sustainable development indicators to assess biophysical traits, socioeconomic factors, governance structures, and pollutant loads.
- Component 2 (IRBM Pilot Project Demonstration): Executes targeted physical pilots in priority hotspots while strengthening institutional frameworks and crafting long-term strategies and action plans.
- Component 3 (IRBM Knowledge Management and Enabling Capacities): Develops manuals, guides and templates that also embed Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) principles into long-term river basin management.

13.14. *Summary of National Pilot Demonstrations (Component 2):*

13.15. Cambodia (Kampong Bay River Basin): Focused on Kampot City, the project addresses pollutant flows and ecosystem protection. Key initiatives include conducting a feasibility study for a centralized wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) serving 8,011 residents in western Kampot City, alongside deploying community-based decentralized wastewater and solid waste solutions in the Kampong Samaki Community Fishery in tandem with local women-led ecotourism initiatives.

13.16. Indonesia (Ciliwung River Basin): Targeting Depok City to reduce pollution entering Jakarta Bay, the project introduces an integrated waste management model combining wastewater treatment and organic food-waste processing at two Nutritional Provision Service Units. By capturing biogas to lower carbon emissions, the initiative leverages co-financing from the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

13.17. Lao PDR (Nam Tha River Basin): Spanning Luang Namtha, Oudomxay, and Bokeo provinces, actions focus on nature-based solutions and forest restoration to manage sediment, prevent flooding, and secure water flows. Interventions include headwater protection and water supply in Bokeo, indigenous weaving

livelihood support in Luang Namtha, and agricultural extension services in the Nam Hin Reservoir in Oudomxay.

- 13.18. Malaysia (Kedah River Basin): Focusing on Alor Setar City and downstream areas draining into the Andaman Sea, baseline assessments from the upper Pedu Dam to the coast have been completed. Final pilot deployments, such as eco-friendly biological technologies led by the Department of Irrigation and Drainage, will be finalized in late 2026 alongside the Kedah River Strategic Action Plan.
- 13.19. Philippines (Imus-Ylang Ylang - Rio Grande & Pasac-Guagua Watersheds): Concentrated in Amadeo (Cavite) as well as Guagua and Sasmuan (Pampanga) to clean up runoff entering Manila Bay. Major projects include constructing a Septage Treatment Plant in Amadeo through a multi-agency partnership and completing Technology Needs Assessments for organic waste to align with provincial solid waste strategies and accessing GCF carbon benefits.
- 13.20. Viet Nam (Vu Gia Thu Bon River Basin): Targeting Duy Nghia Fishing Port, the Truong Giang River, and Da Nang City to reduce marine plastic and municipal solid waste. Measures include source-separation programs at fishing ports, creating a "Solid Waste-Free Community" model along the river, and executing a formal memorandum of understanding between Da Nang City and the Republic of Korea (KEITI) for solid waste management.
- 13.21. *Supporting Mechanisms, Theory of Change, and Next Steps*
- 13.22. Ms. Bermas emphasized that these field actions are backed by crucial analytical tools. Following the launch of the State of River Basin (SORB) Guidebook at the 2024 EAS Congress, the Nam Tha SORB report was formally published, with five additional reports currently undergoing review for release this year and Malaysia's report scheduled for publication next year.
- 13.23. She explained that as a foundational initiative, the project's Theory of Change targets three distinct orders of outcomes that will eventually contribute to the Fourth Order, a more sustainable and resilient S2S system; and blue and green growth opportunities materialize:
  - First Order: Creation of enabling conditions for S2S governance initiative.
  - Second Order: Changed behavior resource users and key institutions.
  - Third Order: Achievement of desired changes in societal and environmental conditions.

- 13.24. In closing, Ms. Bermas outlined the immediate next steps following the provisional approval of the project extension. The PRF will convene an ad-hoc RSC meeting in Q4 2026 to formally review and finalize the adjusted multi-year work plan through 2028. She highlighted that the project continues to make key contributions to global environmental objectives, regional ASEAN cooperation, and the achievement of UN SDGs 6, 13, 14, 15, and 17, before thanking the Chair and PC members for their ongoing support.
- 13.25. Reducing Marine Plastics in the East Asian Seas Project
- 13.26. *Project Context*
- 13.27. Mr. Hunguen Kim, PRF Senior Manager, presented the Reducing Marine Plastics in the East Asian Seas Project, known as the Marine Plastics ODA Project. He presented an overview of the ongoing threat posed by plastic pollution to marine ecosystems across the EAS region. Recognized for its high biodiversity, including coral reefs, mangroves, and seagrass beds, the region is simultaneously vulnerable due to high marine plastic leakage rates. To address this challenge, the Project was established as a 6-year, 12 billion KRW (~US\$9 million) initiative running from 2023 to 2028, funded by the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) of RoKorea and implemented by PEMSEA.
- 13.28. Mr. Kim reaffirmed the project's alignment with national and regional policy frameworks, including the Philippines' National Plan of Action for Marine Litter and Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act of 2022, Timor-Leste's national plastic policies, PEMSEA's SDS-SEA Implementation Plan (2023–2030), and the UN SDGs. The project targets 10 sites in total, 6 across the Philippines (in partnership with DENR) and 4 in Timor-Leste (in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Forestry).
- 13.29. The project aims to strengthen local governance for marine plastic management, demonstrate best practices and innovative reduction solutions, conduct beach litter monitoring to track plastic pollution, and build capacity, awareness, and communication among stakeholders. To achieve these goals, the project is structured around four core components.
- 13.30. *Component Progress and Key Findings*
- 13.31. Component 1: Local Governance on Marine Plastics Management. Baseline Assessments, using the Plastic Analysis and Characterization Study (PACS),

adapted from the Philippines' National Waste Analysis and Characterization Study (WACS), were conducted across all sites. A key insight highlighted was that diapers, sanitary napkins, and PET bottles emerged as the most prevalent plastic items across sites, with high PET bottle consumption directly linked to limited access to safe drinking water.

- 13.32. Component 2: Demonstration of Best Practices and Innovative Solutions for Reducing Marine Plastics and Marine Plastic Management. Adopting a life-cycle approach (prevention, collection and transport, treatment and recycling, and raising awareness), six site-specific pilot solutions were detailed for the Philippine LGUs:
- Bulan, Sorsogon: Upgrading the Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) with an expansion, a new shredder, and collection vehicles to boost waste diversion.
  - Calbayog City, Samar: Implementing "Ocean Shield," consisting of trash traps, flatboats, a baling machine, and dedicated collection vehicles.
  - Daanbantayan, Cebu: Expanding processing capacity with extra molders to manufacture plastic boards from waste.
  - Dipolog City, Zamboanga del Norte: Installing trash barriers in a creek, a manual waste lifter, and a collection boat to intercept riverine debris.
  - Puerto Princesa City, Palawan: Deploying the "HABAL," which are collection vehicles designed for narrow, congested barangay roads.
  - Tandag City, Surigao del Sur: Setting up a processing facility with shredders, extruders, and molders to turn plastic waste into plastic lumber and school chairs.
- 13.33. For Timor-Leste, pilot project development officially commenced following the signing of the revised MOU in October 2025.
- 13.34. *Component 3: Beach Monitoring on Marine Plastics and Litter*
- 13.35. Quarterly monitoring is conducted across 18 stations using standard protocols adapted from Korea's National Beach Litter Monitoring Program, supported by 9 local universities and NGOs.
- 13.36. All monitoring data is made publicly accessible through the EAS Marine Plastic Data Center.
- Cumulative Results (2024–2025): Over 45,000 litter items weighing 1.6 metric tons were collected.
  - Key Indicators: Plastics accounted for 85% of all items collected, and over 90% of the marine litter was traced to domestic sources.

- Site Trends: Tandag recorded the highest debris count in the Philippines (8,359 items, peaking in Q1).
- 13.37. In Timor-Leste, Atauro recorded the highest total debris of any site in the project (15,936 items, peaking in Q2) despite having fewer stations.
- 13.38. *Component 4: Capacity, Awareness, and Communication on Marine Plastics Management*
- 13.39. Under the Marine Environmental Protector (MEP) program, public engagement focused on cleanups, youth education, and storytelling:
- 2025 Cleanups: Two major cleanup events (World Ocean Day and International Coastal Cleanup Day) mobilized 3,400+ participants and removed 2.3+ tons of waste. Top collected items included beverage bottles (5,055 pieces) and food wrappers (4,979 pieces).
  - IEC Campaigns: 13 focused campaigns reached 3,404 individuals, with a strong focus on youth (2,560 students).
  - MEP Stories: High-impact human-interest stories were published to showcase community and LGU-led actions in Daanbantayan and Tandag City.
- 13.40. Mr. Kim then concluded with an outline of upcoming milestones leading into late 2026 and the 4th RSC meeting.
- 13.41. Dr. Wakita then called on the ACB to present updates on the implementation of the ENMAPS Project.
- 13.42. Effectively Managing Networks of Marine Protected Areas in Large Marine Ecosystems in the ASEAN Region or the ASEAN ENMAPS Project
- 13.43. Speaking on behalf of Mr. Jerome Montemayor of ACB, Mr. James Santiago presented a progress update on the implementation of the ASEAN ENMAPS Project. Funded by the GEF, the project is implemented by the UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub and executed by the ACB across Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand, with the PRF serving as a key implementing partner.
- 13.44. *Core Rationale and Regional Scope*
- 13.45. At its core, the ASEAN ENMAPS initiative aims to strengthen the management of both individual MPAs and broader MPA networks across targeted LMEs.

Highlighting hydrodynamic circulation patterns, Mr. Santiago emphasized that seasonal ocean currents transport water masses, nutrients, fish larvae, and migratory species across administrative borders. This ecological reality underscores that marine ecosystems do not stop at national boundaries, making cross-border cooperation and network-based conservation an absolute necessity.

13.46. Regionally, the project directly supports the implementation of the ASEAN Biodiversity Plan, while globally advancing the targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically regarding the expansion of effectively managed protected areas, the restoration of critical marine habitats, and the promotion of a sustainable blue economy.

13.47. *Technical Progress and Scientific Foundations*

13.48. The project has made substantial strides in operationalizing its governance architecture and scientific baseline:

- Institutional Governance: National Implementation Units (NIUs) are now fully operational, overseeing technical and field-level implementation. Strategic guidance has been reinforced through national inception meetings, Regional Project Steering Committee meetings, finalized work plans, technical briefings, and methodological harmonization sessions.
- Ecological Connectivity & Species Data: Science-based MPAN planning advanced through the completion of regional ecological connectivity studies and larval dispersal models across four LMEs. To enhance analytical capacity, ACB established a regional marine species database covering 388 ecologically and economically significant species across project sites.
- Fisheries & Spatial Delineation: Fisheries monitoring systems were operationalized using Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) methodologies to support sustainable fisheries management. During the MPAN workshop in May 2026, conceptual network designs were developed and validated, reviewing and defining the delineation of 13,313,181 hectares of marine habitats to lay the technical foundation for future formal designations.

13.49. *Strategic Partnerships and PRF Contributions*

13.50. The project has strengthened multi-stakeholder partnerships to drive marine and coastal governance, collaborating with Global Fishing Watch on vessel monitoring,

capacity building, and inclusive livelihoods, alongside extensive joint work with the PRF.

- 13.51. Baseline Capacity Assessments: The PRF successfully updated the baseline capacity needs assessment report, bridging empirical ecological data with localized social governance indicators.
- 13.52. Site-Specific Training & Financing: Validated capacity assessments laid the groundwork for site-specific training, potential environmental investments, alternative livelihoods, and sustainable financing mechanisms for local communities.
- 13.53. Integrated Management & Mentorship: Dedicated training modules on Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) and Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) were prepared to help LGUs and park managers integrate "ridge-to-reef" principles, zoning schemes, and sustainable fisheries into local development plans. Additionally, the PRF developed a concept note for an internship program on integrated MPA management to engage early-career technical professionals.
- 13.54. *Safeguards, Knowledge Management, and Future Priorities*
- 13.55. The initiative has actively embedded environmental and social safeguards into its planning, ensuring inclusive governance by engaging women, Indigenous Peoples (IPs), youth, and local fishers. Outreach and visibility were boosted through targeted campaigns, such as Empowered Voices of ASEAN and Fun Fact Fridays, alongside project experience notes and technical publications hosted on the ACB digital platforms.
- 13.56. Looking ahead, the ENMAPS project will prioritize:
  - Accelerating science-based MPAN designs across 11 pilot sites, incorporating connectivity, socioeconomic, and governance considerations.
  - Reinforcing inclusive safeguards through Strategic Environmental and Social Assessments (SESA), Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) processes, Grievance Redress Mechanisms (GRM), and an IPs Plan.
  - Scaling up strategic partnerships in ICM, fisheries governance, and the blue economy while utilizing Mid-Term Review (MTR) findings to guide adaptive management and long-term sustainability.
  - Maintaining close coordination with national governments, ASEAN bodies, and regional stakeholders to ensure long-term policy relevance and sustainable conservation across priority LMEs.

- 13.57. Dr. Wakita opened the floor for comments and questions.
- 13.58. **Discussion highlights:**
- 13.59. Dr. Linlin Zhao of P.R. China, welcomed the presentations and observed that not all CPs are currently participating in these regional projects, encouraging PEMSEA to promote broader CP and NCP participation.
- 13.60. Mr. Masanori Kobayashi of the OPRI, Japan raised whether spatial differences in marine plastic density were being monitored and underscored the need to assess policy and institutional mechanisms that curb land-based plastic leakage into rivers and seas. Looking ahead, he highlighted two critical areas for regional knowledge exchange: scaling up best practices to recover existing floating marine plastics and addressing the complex management of transboundary coastal ecosystems. He emphasized that helping Southeast and East Asian nations navigate heavily congested ocean spaces requires integrated, multi-use management approaches. He encouraged the project team to consider embedding these aspects into future collaborative frameworks.
- 13.61. In response, the ED acknowledged the participation gap, noting that project eligibility is often constrained by donor criteria such as countries' eligibility to qualify as recipient country and ASEAN membership. She expressed hope that forthcoming proposals such as the BluePASS and the Blue Solutions project would allow broader participation, with developed countries serving as knowledge partners, technical assistance providers and co-financiers.
- 13.62. The ED also acknowledged the suggestion of OPRI in the design of discussions on good practice exchange in tackling transboundary issues and common policy dilemmas
- 13.63. **Conclusion:** The Council took note of the updates on PRF-executed regional projects, namely Integrated River Basin Management, the Marine Plastics ODA project, and the ASEAN ENMAPS project, and encouraged broader CP and NCP participation in future regional project development.

13.64. **Recommendations:**

- PRF to undertake bilateral consultations with all country partners to discuss and seek endorsement of the BluePASS proposal.
- Future project design to include PNLG, PNLC, and relevant NCPs based on their competencies and areas of expertise.
- Consider the conduct of a technical session or roundtable discussion on marine plastics and sustainable fisheries management, according to OPRI's recommendations.

13.65. **Decision:** The PRF Project Updates were noted with appreciation.

**14. PEMSEA YOUNG LEADERS' READINESS PROGRAM (PC/18/DOC/11)**

- 14.1. Dr. Wakita invited Ms. April Tigulo to share the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness (PYLR) Program for recommendations and approval.
- 14.2. Ms. Tigulo presented the program's rationale, noting that PEMSEA's youth engagement has historically been event-based around the Triennial EAS Youth Forum, lacking a continuous engagement pathway.
- 14.3. The proposed program, which advances Strategic Objective 2 on Empowered Stakeholders under the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023–2030, is structured around five components: targeted training in ocean governance and Integrated Coastal Management (ICM); hands-on immersion in active PEMSEA project activities; youth-led knowledge generation and ocean storytelling; direct exposure to governance through observation of Partnership Council meetings; and collaborative co-design of the Youth Forum for the EAS Congress 2027 in Indonesia.
- 14.4. Key expected outcomes include policy briefs, photo essays, and session outlines, culminating in the comprehensive Youth Engagement and PNYL Roadmap 2027–2032.
- 14.5. Ms. Tigulo noted that sustainability is embedded into the project's design by tapping into existing regional networks rather than creating standalone administrative frameworks. Concluding her presentation, she called upon the PC Technical Session to review Document PC/18/DOC/11 and offer strategic guidance to support the institutionalization of the program.

- 14.6. Prior to opening the floor for general discussion, Dr. Wakita highlighted a historic milestone for the EAS PC – welcoming youth delegates as official participants for the very first time. Framing this as a clear signal of the partnership’s evolving direction, she emphasized that the younger generation will directly inherit the marine environments currently under protection.
- 14.7. She introduced youth delegate Dr. Kenny Pang, a Singapore-based professional with an extensive international background and a doctorate, noting that a second youth delegate was regrettably unable to attend due to a personal emergency. Dr. Wakita invited Dr. Pang to share his initial reactions to the proposed PEMSEA Young Leaders’ Readiness Program, specifically asking what excited him, what areas could be strengthened, and what young leaders expect from PEMSEA in ocean governance.
- 14.8. Drawing from personal memories of disappearing mangrove ecosystems, Dr. Pang underscored that while youth are deeply invested in ocean health, many feel sidelined by a lack of clear pathways to contribute. He commended PEMSEA’s shift toward a structured, institutionalized framework, stressing that youth involvement must go beyond event attendance to become an active element of coastal governance. To maximize the program’s impact, he urged PEMSEA to focus on building youth agency by connecting their efforts to tangible governance outcomes. He also recommended shifting communication strategies from purely highlighting environmental threats to showcasing positive, solutions-oriented impact stories from PEMSEA’s collaborative projects. Providing young people with evidence that solutions work, he noted, cultivates the ownership and optimism needed for sustained engagement.
- 14.9. Expressing his support for upcoming regional events, including the next EAS Congress, Dr. Pang concluded his remarks with a warm reception (*Annex 2: Intervention of the Youth Delegate*).
- 14.10. Dr. Wakita affirmed that Dr. Pang’s voice encapsulated the vision of the Young Leaders Program, calling on all partners to incorporate his recommendations before passing the floor to the other delegation to initiate broader feedback.
- 14.11. **Discussion highlights:**
- 14.12. Dr. Al Orolfo of the Philippines recognized the program as an important mechanism building on the momentum of the EAS Congress Youth Forum, and recommended further refinement of selection criteria, expected outputs, including a wider range of digital knowledge products, and inclusion of on-site presentations or site visits.

- 14.13. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea requested clarification on how the program differs from PEMSEA's existing youth engagement activities and how it would be financed in the future.
- 14.14. Ms. Nguyen Thuc Hien of Viet Nam expressed support for wide regional implementation of the PYLR program and proposed to leverage and expand the success of the young leaders' network to country level with the support of PEMSEA. Viet Nam is also willing to collaborate in mobilizing funds for this activity.
- 14.15. Ms. Aditya Yuniarti of Indonesia suggested institutionalizing youth involvement through PNLG or PNLC to foster continuous leadership and sustainability of the program.
- 14.16. Dr. Linlin Zhao of the P.R. China expressed China's support for the program, citing China's co-organization of the Shenzhen Blue Wave Conference with PEMSEA as an example of past youth engagement activity.
- 14.17. Mr. Ranjeet Singh of Singapore expressed strong support for the program, particularly for institutionalizing a permanent youth engagement mechanism, and favored leveraging existing structures rather than creating new ones. He recommended merit-based selection balancing geography and sector, sought clarification on whether the same or different groups of youth would participate across the five components, and welcomed the participation of Dr. Kenny Pang as a Singaporean youth delegate.
- 14.18. Mr. Aleixo Leonito Amaral of Timor-Leste congratulated PEMSEA and the youth delegate and expressed hope that the program would help develop future ocean leaders through engagement in PEMSEA programs.
- 14.19. Mr. Roath Sith of Cambodia, supported the initiative and recommended that youth engagement extend beyond forums and research to include life-skills capacity-building for responding to climate disasters, pollution, and biodiversity loss, suggesting that PEMSEA initiate a related project proposal.
- 14.20. Mr. Yoppy Tan of OSRL, Singapore, expressed support and offered to contribute practical operational expertise in marine emergency response, including scenario-based exercises and training on oil spill response frameworks.

- 14.21. Mr. James Santiago of ACB expressed strong support and offered to share best practices, tools, and networks from ACB's ASEAN Youth Biodiversity Program, including the ASEAN Biodiversity Dashboard for digital knowledge products.
- 14.22. Dr. Yonvitner, PNLC President, shared that IPB University and the Center for Coastal and Maritime Studies, as PNLC's hosting secretariat, will offer a summer program for graduate and doctoral students and youth in Bintan Island, Indonesia the following year, to be shared through PEMSEA's information channels.
- 14.23. Mr. Mahesh Pradhan of COBSEA highlighted potential linkages with ASEAN's working group on environmental education and UNEP's Young Champions of the Earth Awards.
- 14.24. Mr. Yinfeng Guo of NMHMS, P.R. China, joining online, suggested renaming the program from the PEMSEA Young Leaders Readiness Program to the PEMSEA Young Leaders Program, noting that youth represent 10 to 15 percent of the global population and should be recognized as ready to contribute rather than as needing to become ready. He also asked how existing national youth platforms could be integrated into the regional program.
- 14.25. Ms. Keodokmay Phouipaseuth of Lao PDR, expressed support for the program and Lao PDR's participation through central government and university representatives.
- 14.26. In response, the ED explained that PEMSEA engagement with the youth had been opportunistic and dependent on partners and funding after a previous funder ceased its operations. However, there are opportunities with the continued availability of a youth alumni network who are willing to help raise ideas for fundraising to re-invigorate the program, it welcomed the suggestion to revise the program's title, and clarified that the program remains at a conceptual stage, to be further refined in consultation with country partners, young leaders, and PEMSEA's alumni network, and also informed also by the experience of organizations with similar youth programs such as ACB and ADB.
- 14.27. **Conclusion:** The Council expressed strong and unanimous support for the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program, welcomed the meaningful participation of youth delegate Dr. Kenny Pang, and endorsed the basic concept of the program on the understanding that PRF will further refine the proposal.

14.28. **Recommendations:**

- PRF Secretariat to refine PYLR selection criteria to balance merit and geographic representation and clarify whether participants are consistent across all components.
- PRF Secretariat to consider revising the program title to better reflect its regional and institutional scope.
- PRF Secretariat to explore integration of existing ASEAN, UNEP, and other youth platforms into the PYLR framework.
- PRF Secretariat to clarify financing arrangements for the PYLR and communicate this to Country Partners, particularly ROK.
- PEMSEA to encourage Country Partners to nominate young professionals for PYLR and to build national-level youth networks linked to PEMSEA activities.

14.29. **Decision:** The basic concept of the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program was adopted, and the institutionalization of the program was endorsed, for further development by the PRF Secretariat.

**15. OTHER BUSINESS (PC/18/DOC/13)**

- 15.1. Dr. Wakita invited Ms. Jiyoung Kim of KIOST, RoKorea, to present under Other Business.
- 15.2. Ms. Kim presented KIOST's contributions to the SDS-SEA implementation program, including hosting a marine spatial planning session at the 2024 EAS Congress in Xiamen, support for a regional biofouling strategy and capacity building, and development of digital twin ocean and marine spatial planning simulation technologies. She also highlighted KIOST's sponsorship of the 2026 International Blue Carbon Seminar in Busan and informed the body of an ongoing Letter of Cooperation with PRF for a blue carbon special session at the 2026 PNLG Annual Forum in Busan. KIOST also provided financial support for the writing and publication of a marine spatial planning-related book in 2026 with PEMSEA-recommended contributors from select countries.
- 15.3. Dr. Wakita thanked KIOST for its continuing contributions to SDS-SEA implementation and its planned collaboration around the PNLG Annual Forum.

## 16. CLOSING OF THE TECHNICAL SESSION

- 16.1. Dr. Wakita summarized the outcomes of the TS, noting lively discussions and recommendations for further refinements of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol and the Marine Protected Areas Report; updates on the 2027 East Asian Seas Congress; adoption of the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Program, and appreciated the updates on PRF led regional projects. She thanked Dr. Kwon and all participants for their engagement, questions, and constructive recommendations.

## INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSION

## 17. OPENING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSION (IGS) AND ADOPTION OF THE IGS AGENDA (PC/18/DOC/14)

- 17.1. Ms. Tigulo welcomed delegates to the IGS of the 18th EAS PC Meeting and handed the floor to the presiding officer, Mr. Le Dai Thang, as EAS PC Intergovernmental Chair.
- 17.2. Mr. Le opened the IGS, describing it as the country-partners-only session where governments provide direction and take decisions to shape PEMSEA's future operations. He recalled the three pillars of long-term sustainability previously endorsed by the 17th EAS PC, namely strategic programming through the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023–2030, institutional strengthening, and financial viability. He welcomed his Co-Chair, Ms. Yu Xinwei, who will be presiding over the second half of the session. He then invited Ms. Tigulo to present the provisional agenda.
- 17.3. Ms. Tigulo presented two agenda items for the IGS:
- Agenda 15 - Updates to the PEMSEA Sustainability Plan (For recommendations);
  - Agenda 16 - PRF Work Plan and Budget for 2026–2027 (For approval); and
  - Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations of the Partnership Council meeting (For review and approval).
- 17.4. **Decision:** The IGS agenda was adopted.

## **18. UPDATES ON THE PEMSEA SUSTAINABILITY PLAN (PC/18/DOC/15)**

### **18.1. Business Development and Resource Mobilization (BDRM) Plan**

18.2. Mr. Le invited PRF consultant Mr. Adonis Socalit to present updates on the Business Development and Resource Mobilization (BDRM) Plan, for review, recommendations and/or approval by the IGS.

18.3. Mr. Socalit presented the BDRM strategy, noting it aims to build PRF's institutional capacity for business development and resource mobilization, diversify funding sources, and move PEMSEA from opportunistic fundraising toward disciplined resource mobilization, in the context of a changing funding environment that favors policy-linked, investment-ready, multi-country, and co-financed programs.

18.4. Mr. Socalit outlined a proposed shift positioning PEMSEA as both a regional solutions platform and an investment enabler, through an eight-part strategic response. This includes portfolio design principles, a five-part revenue model encompassing roles as regional resource mobilizer, grantee or implementing partner, fund manager, deal-maker, and technical assistance provider, development of seven donor-ready program packages including a Circular Ports and Cities Initiative, a Blue Carbon and Nature-based Solutions Program, and a 30-by-30 MPA and OECM booster initiative, and engagement with priority donors including the GCF, GEF, World Bank ProBlue, the Asian Development Bank, and the EU, following a proposed 24-month engagement roadmap.

18.5. He presented the actions requested of the IGS, namely to endorse the strategic shift toward a diversified investment-oriented model, approve development and funding of a partnership and business development function, authorize preparation of a costed project preparation facility plan, endorse creation of a Revenue and Risk Committee with a draft Terms of Reference provided as an annex, direct PRF to develop standardized resource mobilization and risk policies, request refinement of the 18 to 24 month donor engagement plan, strengthen the country partner contribution framework, and adopt initial KPIs for portfolio growth, cost recovery, pipeline development, and donor engagement.

### **18.6. Discussion highlights:**

18.7. Mr. Yang Yafeng of China acknowledged the BDRM plan's alignment with PEMSEA's sustainable development objectives and the PRF Secretariat's efforts

but raised three concerns. First, that the proposed dealmaker and fund manager roles may exceed PRF's existing mandate under PEMSEA's governance rules and risk conflating implementer and referee functions. Second, that these roles would require specialized commercial, financial, and legal expertise the PRF Secretariat currently lacks, creating additional financial burden, and that such governance changes require formal amendment approved by a majority of partners at a PC meeting. Third, the proposed Revenue and Risk Committee requires clearer terms of reference to ensure legitimacy and practical viability. China requested further discussion before reaching consensus.

- 18.8. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea requested clarification on the funding source, purpose, and scale of costs for the proposed project preparation facility before RoKorea could grant authorization. She stated RoKorea's position that a transition to an investment-oriented model, and establishment of a partnership and business development function or a Revenue and Risk Committee, would be inappropriate at this stage, citing concerns raised previously at the 34th Expanded Executive Committee meeting that risks from underperforming PEMSEA projects may ultimately burden Country Partners. She also reiterated RoKorea's view that PEMSEA, as an international organization with a public-interest mandate, should not pursue an investment-oriented funding model at this stage.
- 18.9. Ms. Nguyen Thuc Hien of Viet Nam expressed Viet Nam's interest and requested greater Country Partner involvement at the early stages of project development under the BDRM framework, to ensure alignment with country needs and avoid potential conflicts.
- 18.10. Mr. Yang Yafeng of China emphasized that PEMSEA was established as an intergovernmental organization to promote cooperation on environmental protection and sustainable ocean development, and that project-based funding should remain a means to this end rather than a purpose in itself. He cautioned against PEMSEA transitioning from an intergovernmental to a financial organization, while reaffirming China's willingness to help identify additional budget support.
- 18.11. In response, the ED clarified the basis for PRF's fund administration role under Target 1 of the 2015 Da Nang Compact, *which mandates a self-sustaining PEMSEA Resource Facility empowered to explore innovative financing mechanisms, products, and services to advance regional, national, and local SDS-SEA implementation*. PRF's additional revenues came from services rendered as fund administrator of the Arafura Timor Seas Program; as grant administrator for

the GEF Secretariat and providing technical services on the SEa-maP project to UNOPs. PRF will clarify the 'business and investment related terminologies used in the plan to ensure a shared understanding of the sustainability approach; review and refine the terms of reference for the Revenue and Risk Committee and streamline the actions proposed in the plan.

- 18.12. Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) and Capacity Building Planning
- 18.13. Mr. Le then invited Mr. Don Socalit to present the second component of the agenda, the Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) and Capacity Building Planning update.
- 18.14. Mr. Socalit reported on the OCA Cascade pilot, which extends PRF's Organizational Capacity Framework for Ocean Governance, developed for PRF for pilot application with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of the Philippines.
- 18.15. He described the assessment framework's four capacity domains, namely leadership and governance, management capacity, adaptation and innovation capacity, and operational capacity, comprising 27 capacity elements assessed on a four-level scale. Individual and group consensus assessments were completed in June 2026, and findings are being consolidated into short- and medium-term capacity-building priorities for DENR for 2027.
- 18.16. Mr. Socalit recommended scaling use of the OCA tool to other PEMSEA countries.
- 18.17. **Discussion highlights:**
- 18.18. Dir. Al Orolfo of the Philippines shared that DENR found the OCA tool useful for assessing institutional capacity and stakeholder relations and recommended that PEMSEA share the tool with other Country Partners.
- 18.19. Mr. Nobuyuki Mori of Japan stated that as the OCA was designed to assess PRF's own institutional capacity, extending it to Country Partners should be undertaken only on a voluntary basis and should not become a mandatory requirement, and requested clarification on this point.
- 18.20. Dr. Linlin Zhao of the P.R. China welcomed PRF's OCA initiative and requested that PRF share a post-OCA report clearly demonstrating how the methodology improves outcomes relative to inputs.

- 18.21. Ms. Jinsol Choi of RoKorea stated that as the OCA tool was developed solely through PRF's self-assessment, with outcomes not yet demonstrated, discussion of its wider application at this stage would be premature. She noted that PRF, as a single organization, differs in nature, purpose, and scale from national administrations.
- 18.22. The ED clarified that the use of the OCA tool by Country Partners is voluntary, not mandatory. The pilot application of the tool in the Philippines was based on the country's desire to gauge their offices with coastal and marine mandates' strengths and gaps in their capacity. She added that the PRF Secretariat found the tool useful in identifying capacity and resource gaps in effectively implementing SDS-SEA and helping identify ways and means to address the gaps through collaborating with partners and organizations with complementary technical and financial resources.
- 18.23. Re-engagement with Thailand, Malaysia as Formal Country Partners
- 18.24. The ED presented, for information of the IGS, having been previously tabled at the 35th Expanded Executive Committee meeting, background on PEMSEA's institutional history and the status of engagement with Thailand, Malaysia, and Brunei Darussalam.
- 18.25. The three countries were part of the original 2003 Putrajaya SDS-SEA signatories but did not join the EAS Partnership Council as a formal governance mechanism due to various reasons.
- 18.26. She noted continuing thematic and technical engagement with these countries, including a recently signed Memorandum of Agreement with Malaysia on the Integrated River Basin Management Project.
- 18.27. The 35th EC endorsed the PRF's outreach and collaborative activities through regional projects, ASEAN Working Groups and through the PNLG and PNLC mechanisms.
- 18.28. This update was shared to IG for notation as part of PRF's Sustainability Plan.
- 18.29. **Conclusion:** The Council received the updates on the Business Development and Resource Mobilization Plan and the Organizational Capacity Assessment initiative, noting concerns raised by several Country Partners regarding the proposed investment-oriented model, new institutional functions, and mandatory or wider

application of the OCA tool. It directed the PRF Secretariat to revise the BDRM plan and clarify related terminology and terms of reference for further consideration, incorporating Country Partners' comments.

18.30. **Recommendations**, for the PRF Secretariat to:

- Refine the BDRM terminologies, particularly around 'investment-oriented model' and 'fund management,' to ensure clarity and shared understanding among all Country Partners.
- Share the Revenue and Risk Committee TOR with all Country Partners for review and inputs.
- Clarify proposed revenue streams and how they will be operationalized and present a revised plan that distinguishes PEMSEA's governance role from its operational functions.
- Explore modalities for augmenting Country Partner contributions, given that CSA amounts have remained the same for all countries for nearly three decades.
- Share the OCA report with Country Partners once finalized, with a clear narrative on how the methodology has improved the balance between assessments (input) and actions (output).

18.31. **Decision:** The Intergovernmental (IG) Session:

- Directed the PRF Secretariat to incorporate Country Partners' comments and present a revised plan for further consideration by the PC at the 36th EEC in October 2026;
- Preferred that the application of organizational capacity assessment tools and templates OCA tools are left to the country's discretion.

## **19. PRF WORK PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2026–2027 (PC/18/DOC/16)**

19.1. Ms. Xinwei Yu, presiding officer, invited the PRF ED to present the PRF Work Plan and Budget for 2026–2027 under Agenda Item 16, for approval.

19.2. The ED presented the Work Plan, anchored on the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan's pillars of Healthy Ocean, Healthy People, and Healthy Economies, and measured via a Balanced Scorecard. The 2026–2027 targets include ten catalytic partnerships and collaborations; seven State of River Basin reports and seven pilot IRBM projects across six countries; six local government units implementing marine plastics solutions in the Philippines; blue carbon accounting methodology tested in three sites; governance support for the Benham Rise or Philippine Rise

marine resource reserve; the Arafura Timor Seas Regional Action Program on abandoned, lost, and discarded fishing gear; one to two countries piloting the OCA tool; training manuals and toolkits for IRBM, ICM, and marine spatial planning; and utilization of the Sea Knowledge Bank platform. On financial sustainability, PRF set a target of securing US\$4 million annually from diverse funding sources.

- 19.3. She presented the proposed budget, noting an increase from US\$3.4 million in 2025 to US\$6.7 million in 2026, aided by execution management and fund administration fees, with a projected dip in 2027, with the conclusion of some projects such as SEa-MaP and GEF Sec grant program.
- 19.4. She cautioned that the 2026 financial figure remains subject to change pending confirmation of country contributions. She then presented an overview of future funding pipelines, highlighting key initiatives such as the IKI-IMO Blue Solutions project, the Blue Carbon and Biodiversity Certification for People, Adaptation, and Sustainable East Asia (BluePASS), the UNDP/GEF-IMO GloFouling Capacity Development Project II, the COBSEA/PEMSEA Regional MPA project (SEASCAPES), and the IMO/Philippines SMART-C TRAFFIC project.
- 19.5. Additionally, she noted funding opportunities under the IMO/Philippines SMART-C GHG Project funded by RoKorea and administered by the IMO, alongside a proposed ASEAN Secretariat–World Bank marine plastics knowledge platform. Potential support from a Philippine Biodiversity Foundation for youth and marine conservation project preparation is also under consideration. PRF is also working on its application for regional accreditation of the GCF.
- 19.6. Further prospects likewise include an ongoing review of Philippine international-commitments funding for potential additional contribution from the Philippine Government, as well as funding opportunities from KMGlobal Biodiversity Framework Fund and ASEAN Trust funds supported by China, Japan, the EU, and RoKorea. Concluding her remarks, she confirmed that the IRBM project will be extended to 2028 on a no-cost basis, subject to procedural requirements.
- 19.7. **Discussion highlights:**
- 19.8. Ms. Chen Danhong of China acknowledged PRF's substantial body of work and fundraising efforts and suggested that the PRF Secretariat work with Country Partners to distill and highlight key achievements for effective presentation and promotion at the 2027 EAS Congress.

- 19.9. **Conclusion:** The IG Session acknowledged the PRF's substantial planned work program and fundraising pipeline for 2026–2027 and welcomed the suggestion to consolidate key achievements for promotion at the 2027 EAS Congress.
- 19.10. **Decision:** The PRF Work Plan and Budget for 2026–2027 was approved.

## **20. SUMMARY AND APPROVAL OF CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL MEETING (PC/18/DOC/18)**

- 20.1. Mr. Le introduced the summary of conclusions and recommendations of the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting as the most important item of the IGS and invited the PRF Secretariat Coordinator, Ms. April Tigulo, to present the summary.
- 20.2. After the presentation, the ED noted that some modifications would be needed for clarity of language and proper attribution, while emphasizing that the substance of the decisions reflected in the draft conclusions and decisions was the key consideration for review and approval during the session.
- 20.3. Mr. Le opened the floor for further corrections, additions, or comments. All input received was noted, and the PRF Secretariat was instructed to update the document accordingly.
- 20.4. **Conclusion:** The Council reviewed the summary of conclusions and recommendations of the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting, incorporating real-time corrections from Country Partners, with no further objections following the PRF Secretariat's revisions.
- 20.5. **Decision:** The Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations of the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting was adopted, subject to incorporation of the corrections noted during the session.

## **21. PRF SECRETARIAT ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- 21.1. Mr. Le handed over the floor to Ms. Xinwei to chair Agenda Item 19 and close the IG session. Ms. Xinwei then invited the PRF Secretariat to share any announcements.
- 21.2. On the PRF ED recruitment timeline, Ms. Tigulo noted the Selection Committee Chair's update and EAS PC notification on July 22, 2026, issuance of a formal job

offer and completion of reference checks and medical screening in August 2026, and an anticipated announcement of the new Executive Director at the 36th Expanded Executive Committee meeting, to be held online, in October 2026.

- 21.3. On the schedule for review and publication of the 18th EAS PC proceedings, she outlined drafting from July 28 to August 7, 2026, Country Partner review and approval from August 8 to 17, 2026, and publication of proceedings on PEMSEA's official website by August 18, 2026.
- 21.4. Ms. Tigulo also requested that Country Partners complete the PRF Secretariat's activity evaluation form.
- 21.5. She then delivered housekeeping announcements, including the schedule and logistics for the afternoon site visit to Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, departure at 1:45 PM from Aloft Singapore Novena, with the site visit from 2:30 to 6:00 PM.
- 21.6. **CLOSING OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SESSION AND THE 18th EAS PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL MEETING**
- 21.7. Atty. Jonas Leones, EAS PC Chair, delivered his closing remarks marking the conclusion of the 18th EAS Partnership Council Meeting, reflecting on the two days of Council Session, Technical Session, and Intergovernmental Session discussions on blue carbon, marine protected areas, regional projects, the sustainability of PEMSEA, and the adoption of the meeting's conclusions and recommendations. The Chair shared personal reflections on Singapore, having pursued a master's degree at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and commended Singapore's advancements in waste management and nature-based urban solutions.
- 21.8. The Chair expressed gratitude to the Government of Singapore, including the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Development, the Ministry of Transport, and the National Parks Board, as host and co-organizer, to the PEMSEA Resource Facility under the ED and its PRF Secretariat team, and to all Country Partners and Non-Country Partners for their active participation.
- 21.9. **Decision:** The EAS PC Chair formally declared the 18th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting officially closed.

## Annex 1.0 - Agenda of the 18th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Meeting

| Date        | No  | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Action Requested                                   |
|-------------|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| July 21     |     | Arrival of participants                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                    |
| July 22     |     | <b>Council Session</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                    |
| 8:30 - 9:00 |     | <b>Registration</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                    |
| 9:00 - 9:05 |     | <b>Welcome remarks</b><br><b>Mr. Ranjeet Singh</b><br>Divisional Director (International Policy)<br>Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment<br>Singapore<br><br><i>Representative of the Singapore Government as host of the 18th East Asian Seas (EAS) Partnership Council (PC) Meeting.</i> |                                                    |
| 9:05 - 9:10 | 1.0 | <b>Opening of the 18<sup>th</sup> EAS Partnership Council Meeting</b><br><br><b>Usec. Jonas Leones</b><br>Chair, EAS Partnership Council<br><br><i>The Council Chair will formally open the 18<sup>th</sup> EAS Partnership Council Meeting.</i>                                                     |                                                    |
| 9:10 - 9:15 | 1.0 | <b>Adoption of the Meeting Agenda</b><br><br><b>Ms. April Tigulo</b><br>Secretariat Coordinator, PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF)<br><br><i>The Secretariat shall present the provisional agenda of the meeting.</i>                                                                                   | <b>1. Approval of the Agenda</b>                   |
| 9:15 - 9:30 | 2.0 | <b>Report of the EAS Partnership Council Chair</b><br><br><b>Usec. Jonas Leones</b><br>Chair, EAS Partnership Council<br><br><i>The Chair shall deliver the summary of key agreements and actions taken by the Executive Committee during the intersessional period.</i>                             | <b>1. Acceptance of the Council Chair's Report</b> |

| Date          | No  | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Action Requested                    |
|---------------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 9:30 - 10:00  | 3.0 | <b>Report of the PRF Executive Director (2025)</b><br><br><b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b><br>Executive Director, PRF<br><br><i>The PRF Executive Director shall present the key accomplishments of the PEMSEA Resource Facility, in line with the targets of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) Implementation Plan 2023-2030.</i>                                          | 1. Acceptance of the ED's Report    |
| 10:00 - 10:15 |     | <b>Group Photo and Health Break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                     |
| 10:15 - 10:35 | 4.0 | <b>Election of the Council Co-Chair</b><br><br><b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b><br>Executive Director, PRF                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 1. Approval of the Election Results |
| 10:35 - 11:00 | 5.0 | <b>Results of the Selection of the new Executive Director of the PEMSEA Resource Facility</b><br><br><b>Usec. Jonas Leones</b><br>Chair, Selection Committee<br><br><i>The Selection Committee Chair shall present the results of the Selection Committee's deliberation on the search for the PRF Executive Director for the term CY 2027 - 2029</i>                                                       | 1. For Notation                     |
| 11:00 - 11:20 | 6.0 | <b>Any Other Business</b><br><br><b>1. PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) Workplan 2026-2027</b><br><br><b>Dr. Fang Qinhu</b><br>Deputy Secretary General, PNLG Secretariat<br>Vice President, PNLC<br><br><b>2. PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC) Workplan 2026-2027</b><br><br><b>Dr. Yonvitner</b><br>President, PNLC<br><br><i>Sharing of 2026-2027 workplans of the PNLG and PNLC.</i> | 1. For information                  |

| Date                     | No  | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Action Requested                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11:20 - 13:00            |     | <b>Lunch Break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Technical Session</b> |     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                 |
| 13:00 - 13:10            | 7.0 | <p><b>Opening of the Technical Session and Adoption of the Technical Session Agenda</b></p> <p><b>Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon</b><br/>Chair, Technical Session</p> <p><i>The Technical Session Chair shall formally open the Technical Session and the PRF Secretariat shall present the provisional agenda.</i></p> <p><i>Note: The presiding officer role for this session will be co-shared. Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon will preside over Items 7.0 to 10.0, and Dr. Kazumi Wakita as Technical Session Co-Chair will preside over Items 11.0 to 13.0.</i></p> | 1. Approval of the Agenda                                                                                                       |
| 13:10 - 14:10            | 8.0 | <p><b>Updates on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program and Launch of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol (RBCAP)</b></p> <p><b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b><br/>Executive Director, PRF</p> <p><b>Ms. Kristina Ticman</b><br/>Consultant, Blue Carbon</p> <p><i>The PRF Secretariat shall provide updates on the current activities and next steps of the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program. Furthermore, the BC TWG-endorsed RBCAP shall be presented for the approval of the Technical Session.</i></p>                                               | <p>1. Approval of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol</p> <p>2. Recommendations to enhance the Blue Carbon Program</p> |
| 14:10 - 14:40            | 9.0 | <p><b>2027 East Asian Seas Congress Updates</b></p> <p><b>PRF Secretariat and representative from MOE, Indonesia</b></p> <p><i>The Secretariat shall provide updates on preparations for the 2027 East Asian Seas Congress to be held in October 2027 in Indonesia.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 1. For Notation                                                                                                                 |

| Date          | No   | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Action Requested                                               |
|---------------|------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 14:40 - 15:00 | 10.0 | <p><b>Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas Report</b></p> <p><b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b><br/>Executive Director, PRF</p> <p><i>The Secretariat shall present the results and key recommendations of the Marine Protected Areas in the East Asian Seas report.</i></p>                                                                                                                | 1. Review and/or approval of MPA in the East Asian Seas Report |
| 15:00 - 15:20 |      | <b>Health Break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                |
| 15:20 - 15:40 | 11.0 | <p><b>PEMSEA Young Leaders' Program</b></p> <p><b>April Ann D. Tigulo</b><br/>Secretariat Coordinator, PRF</p> <p><i>The Secretariat shall introduce the key activities conducted in relation to revitalizing and strengthening youth engagement in the region, through the PEMSEA Young Leaders' Readiness Program.</i></p>                                                                | 1. Recommendations to enhance the PEMSEA Young Leaders Program |
| 15:40 - 16:40 | 12.0 | <p><b>PRF Project Updates</b></p> <p><b>Ms. Nancy Bermas</b><br/>Regional Project Manager</p> <p><b>Mr. Hunguen Kim</b><br/>Senior Manager, MOF/PEMSEA ODA</p> <p><b>Dr. Jerome Montemayor</b><br/>Executive Director, Asean Center for Biodiversity</p> <p><i>The Secretariat shall provide updates on the key activities and outputs of the regional projects implemented by PRF.</i></p> | 1. For comments, clarification/ information                    |
| 16:40 - 16:45 | 13.0 | <p><b>Other Business</b></p> <p><i>Members of the Technical Session may opt to discuss key topics, updates or upcoming activities relevant to PEMSEA.</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | 1. For information                                             |

| Date          | No                                                           | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Action Requested                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16:45 - 16:50 |                                                              | <b>Closing of Technical Session</b><br>The Technical Session Chair or Co-Chair shall close the Technical Session.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 19:00 - 21:00 |                                                              | <b>Welcome Dinner</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| July 23       | <b>Intergovernmental Session<br/>(Country Partners Only)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| 9:00 - 9:10   | 14.0                                                         | <b>Opening of the Intergovernmental Session and Adoption of the Intergovernmental Session Agenda</b><br><br><b>Mr. Le Dai Thang</b><br>Chair, Intergovernmental Session<br><br><i>The Intergovernmental Session Chair shall formally open the Technical Session, and the Secretariat shall present the provisional agenda.</i><br><br><i>Note: The presiding officer's role for this session will be co-shared. Mr. Le Dai Thang will preside over Items 14.0 and 15.0, and Dr. Yu Xinwei as Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair will preside over Items 16.0 and 17.0. Mr. Le will resume the chair for the final approval of recommendations.</i> | 1. Approval of the Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 9:10 - 10:10  | 15.0                                                         | <b>Updates on the PEMSEA Sustainability Plan</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Business Development and Resource Mobilization (BDRM) Plan</b><br/><br/> <b>Mr. Adonis Socalit</b>, Consultant, PRF</li> <li><b>Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) and Capacity Development Planning</b><br/><br/> <b>Mr. Adonis Socalit</b>, Consultant, PRF</li> <li><b>Re-engagement with Thailand, Malaysia as formal country partners</b><br/><br/> <b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b>, Executive Director, PRF</li> </ol>                                                                                                                            | 1. Recommendations to and approval of the Business Development and Resource Mobilization Plan<br>2. Recommendations to scale the use of OCA tool to other PEMSEA countries<br>3. Recommendations on re-engaging with non-PEMSEA EAS countries |

| Date          | No   | Agenda                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Action Requested                                              |
|---------------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
|               |      | <i>The Secretariat shall present key updates related to initiatives supporting the implementation of the PEMSEA Sustainability Plan, including the development of a BDRM Plan, results of the pilot-testing of the OCA in the Philippines, and discussions on strategies to re-engage with non-PEMSEA EAS countries.</i> |                                                               |
| 10:10 - 10:40 |      | <b>Health Break</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                               |
| 10:40 - 11:00 | 16.0 | <b>PRF Work Plan and Budget for 2026 - 2027</b><br><br><b>Ms. Aimee Gonzales</b><br>Executive Director, PRF<br><br><i>The Secretariat shall present the 2026-2027 Workplan and Budget of the PRF.</i>                                                                                                                    | 1. Approval of the Workplan and Budget                        |
| 11:00 - 11:05 | 17.0 | <b>Other business</b><br><br><i>PEMSEA Country Partners may take this opportunity to raise other governance-related concerns.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                               |
| 11:05 - 11:25 | 18.0 | <b>Summary and Approval of Conclusions and Recommendations of the Partnership Council Meeting</b><br><br><b>April Ann D. Tigulo</b><br>Secretariat Coordinator, PRF<br><br><i>The PRF Secretariat shall present a summary of conclusions and recommendations of all sessions.</i>                                        | 1. Approval of the Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations |
| 11:25 - 11:30 | 19.0 | <b>PRF Secretariat Announcements</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                               |
| 11:30 - 11:40 |      | <b>Closing of the Intergovernmental Session</b><br><br>The Intergovernmental Session Chair shall adjourn the session.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                               |
| 11:40 - 11:45 |      | <b>Closing of the 18<sup>th</sup> EAS PC Meeting</b><br><br>The EAS PC Chair shall close the 18 <sup>th</sup> EAS PC Meeting.                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                               |

| Date          | No | Agenda                                                                               | Action Requested |
|---------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| 11:45 - 13:00 |    | Lunch Break                                                                          |                  |
| 14:30 - 18:00 |    | Site Visit at Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve, Visitor Centre, 60 Kranji Way, Singapore |                  |
| July 24       |    | Departure of Participants                                                            |                  |

## **Annex 2.0**

### **Intervention of the Youth Delegate<sup>1</sup>**

Dr. Kenny Pang, Research Fellow, Singapore Institute of Technology  
18<sup>th</sup> East Asian Seas Partnership Council Technical Session  
22 July 2026 | Singapore

I vividly remember seeing mangrove trees illuminated by thousands of fireflies at the Kuala Selangor Nature Park when I was younger. Sadly, such sights are becoming increasingly rare. That memory reminds me why the work we are discussing matters.

Many young people care deeply about protecting our coast and oceans because we will ultimately inherit the consequences of today's decisions (and indecision). However, many youth also feel powerless and do not always know where or how we can contribute meaningfully.

I am encouraged by PEMSEA's effort to engage the youth and move towards a more structured programme. The Young Leader's Readiness Programme (YLRP) is an important step because it recognizes that youth participation should not be limited to attending forums but should become part of the boarder process of coastal and ocean governance.

For me, the most important factor is ensuring that young people develop both a sense of identity and agency. We need to feel that we have a role to play, and that our contributions can make a genuine difference. When young people can see their ideals, skills, and effort contribute to real outcomes, they are more likely to remain engaged between congress cycles and continue contributing over the long term.

One area that I feel could be further strengthened is youth communication aspect. Alongside highlighting environmental challenges, I hope it will also showcase positive stories and tangible impacts resulting from PEMSEA's work with governments, local communities, researchers, and partners.

Young people are often told what the problems are. What inspires continued participation is seeing evidence that solutions are possible and that collaboration can lead to real change. Sharing those success stories can help young people understand not only why coastal and ocean governance matters, but also how they themselves can contribute.

My recommendation is therefore to ensure that youth engagement activities provide opportunities for meaningful contributions and to communicate the real-world impacts that result from these efforts. Doing so will help build stronger sense of ownership, optimism, and long-term commitment among the next generation of ocean leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> Statement presented during 18th East Asian Seas Partnership Council Technical Session. This is the first time a youth delegate has been officially invited to participate in an EAS Partnership Council meeting.

### **Annex 3.0 - Meeting Documents**

[Link](#)

### **Annex 4.0 - Main Presentation**

[Link](#)

### **Annex 5.0 - Photos**

[Link](#)

### **Annex 6.0 - List of Participants**

[Link](#)

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