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Twenty-first Meeting of the Coordinating
Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)
Bangkok, Thailand
26 March 2013

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY-FIRST MEETING
OF THE COORDINATING BODY ON THE SEAS OF EAST ASIA (COBSEA)**

AGENDA ITEM 1: OPENING OF THE MEETING

1.1 *Welcome address and opening remarks on behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP*

1. Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Director, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation (DEPI), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) delivered the welcome address and opening remarks on behalf of the Executive Director of UNEP, Mr. Achim Steiner. He welcomed delegates to Bangkok at this pivotal time for the Regional Action Plan for the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine and Coastal Areas in the East Asian Region.

2. Emphasizing the immense benefits coastal and marine ecosystems provide, as well as the threats they face, he pointed out that COBSEA is needed now, more than ever before. Adopted in 1981 and revised in 1994, it was a visionary approach in the creation of a regional platform to manage shared resources. He stated that the 21st IGM gives the opportunity to improve the performance and implementation of this regional framework and to ensure COBSEA's mandate is delivered to its member States. He further stated that COBSEA requires care and attention, and that UNEP remains absolutely engaged to support and revive COBSEA. However, a higher political commitment and stronger buy-in from member states is also needed, which requires identifying an institutional set-up, a governance structure and financial arrangements that are viable. Unlike in many other Regional Seas programmes, the financial contributions in COBSEA are based on a "willingness to pay". It is clear that after more than 30 years the contributions need to be adjusted to take into consideration the important economic, social and environmental challenges that have occurred in the region. Only when member states have shown their leadership in stepping up their efforts, donor and partner countries would consider increasing their financial support for activities. UNEP Secretariat itself will be more confident in mobilizing itself and mobilizing donors to provide their assistance. He concluded by saying that this meeting will be remembered for the visionary decisions made, and encouraged delegates to look at effectively serving common interests.

1.2 *Introduction of participants*

3. The participants were invited to briefly introduce themselves to the meeting. The participants included representatives from the COBSEA member countries Cambodia, the People's Republic of China, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. In addition, representatives from UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi, UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, and the COBSEA Secretariat also attended the meeting. The list of participants is attached as **Annex I** to this report.

1.3 *Presentation of credentials*

4. In accordance with Rule 17 of the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, applicable *mutatis mutandis* to this meeting, the Bureau of the plenary was called to examine the credentials of the representatives of States participating in the 21st Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia.

5. As of 16.00 hours of 26 March 2013, the representatives of the nine COBSEA Participating countries, invited to take part in the 21st Intergovernmental Meeting of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia, are in attendance. **Six (6)** States submitted to the Meeting Secretariat their formal credentials signed by Heads of State, Heads of Government or Ministers of Foreign Affairs, which were found to be in order:

Cambodia, China (People's Republic of), Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand.

6. Information concerning the appointment of representatives participating in the meeting was communicated to the Meeting Secretariat by letters from other government offices or authorities in the Ministries of Environment, for the representatives of the following **three (3)** States participating in the meeting:

Indonesia, Republic of Korea and Viet Nam.

AGENDA ITEM 2: ORGANISATION OF THE MEETING

2.1 Designation of officers

7. In accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, applicable as agreed to this meeting, the participants were invited to elect a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and a Rapporteur. The meeting agreed to elect the following officers:

Chairperson:	Mr. Noppon Srisuk, Director General, Department of Marine and Coastal Resources, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Thailand
Vice-Chairperson:	Mr. Eng Tiang Sing, Director, International Policy Division, Ministry of the Environment and Water, Singapore
Rapporteur:	Dr. Zulkifli Abdul Rahman, Deputy Director General, Department of Environment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Malaysia

2.2 Organisation of work

8. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to introduce the working and information documents and to brief the meeting participants on the administrative and logistical arrangements for conducting the meeting. The Secretariat informed the participants that the meeting would be conducted in plenary. The meeting would be conducted in English.

2.3 Adoption of the meeting agenda

9. The Secretariat introduced the Agenda of the meeting, noting that it had been shared with member States six weeks prior to the meeting. After considering the provisional agenda submitted by the Secretariat, the meeting adopted the agenda attached as **Annex II** to this report.

2.4 Opening remarks by Member States

10. The Chairperson invited member States to make short opening remarks, including statements on their political and financial commitments and support to COBSEA.

11. The delegate from Cambodia stated that Cambodia has participated in COBSEA since 1994. Since then Cambodia has been represented at high level in COBSEA meetings as it is considered an important body. He stressed Cambodia's commitment to COBSEA, noting the many benefits it provides. In this context he also expressed his concern regarding the current financial status of COBSEA. He noted that Cambodia wishes to see strong and sustainable COBSEA, but is flexible regarding the exact arrangement. Cambodia's contribution is modest but Cambodia is willing to increase this contribution in order to strengthen COBSEA. There are also other regional organizations but COBSEA is distinct from these, which is a strength. In this time of financial crisis Cambodia has sustained its economic growth. He noted that Cambodia cannot be alone in strengthening the financial support to COBSEA, and appealed to all members States to strengthen their contribution. He thanked UNEP, the Secretariat, member States, and the Chair, Vice-chair and Rapporteur, for their contribution to this meeting.

12. The delegate from Thailand expressed sincere gratitude to the COBSEA Secretariat for the arrangement of the meeting and the work to strengthen the sustainability of COBSEA. Thailand has recognized the importance in regional collaboration to address marine and coastal issues and challenges in Thailand since its inception. However, recent times have been challenging for COBSEA to maintain its technical and financial strength. Thailand expressed a hope that COBSEA will move towards a new sustainable future, echoing the remarks of Cambodia.

13. The delegate from Singapore stated that Singapore has been a member since the inception in 1981 and is very pleased that COBSEA has played a role in maintaining the Seas of East Asia. He stated that Singapore is happy to work with member States at the meeting to find a solution for

COBSEA, noting the call at the recent UNEP Governing Council to revitalize Regional Seas programmes around the world. He further looked forward to receiving more information about UNEP's response to that call during the meeting.

14. The delegate from Philippines extended appreciation to UNEP for organizing the meeting, and for having hosted COBSEA for 30 years. He further congratulated the Chair, Vice-chair and Rapporteur on their election. He noted that COBSEA is a pioneering mechanism, important in managing the many threats to the marine environment. These growing threats necessitate adoption of new approaches, investments and prioritization. At this point Philippines fully support the objectives of COBSEA, and will support the decisions of the meeting regarding COBSEA institutional structure

15. The delegate from the Republic of Korea said that in order to achieve efficient and sustainable collaboration through COBSEA, its financial and institutional mechanisms need to be strengthened. This requires detailed assessment of the situation, active discussion and participation of the member states.

16. The delegate from China emphasized that China attaches great importance to cooperation under the COBSEA mechanism, the only intergovernmental mechanism in this area and field, and that it has played a very important role. China appreciates the important role played by UNEP in COBSEA, and look forward to continued support. China's participation in COBSEA will be further developed and enhanced in the future. At this critical moment for COBSEA China seeks collaboration with all member States to find a way that is agreeable to all, during this meeting.

17. The delegate from Malaysia joined other countries in expressing thanks to the UNEP hosted secretariat in facilitating the process for a strengthened COBSEA. Malaysia hopes COBSEA can be strengthened as part of UNEP in supporting the common interests of the region. Malaysia has benefited from COBSEA in a number of ways, including in formulating the national action plans on land based pollution in the South China Sea, which are now being applied also in other parts of the country, e.g. in the Straits of Malacca. Malaysia hopes this meeting will build consensus towards a sustainable future of COBSEA

18. The delegate from Indonesia stated appreciation of UNEP in organizing the meeting and seeking strengthened collaboration between countries through COBSEA. She said that Indonesia is supportive of options to enhance the sustainability of COBSEA that will be discussed in this meeting.

19. The delegate from Viet Nam said he is proud to attend this important meeting where COBSEA Member states discuss the sustainable future of the organization. He emphasized the value of COBSEA to the region and to Viet Nam, and wished for a successful meeting that would enable further development and strengthening of COBSEA.

AGENDA ITEM 3: THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR REPORT ON COBSEA ACTIVITIES 2009-2012

3.1 *Report from the Secretariat*

20. Dr. Jacqueline Alder, COBSEA Officer-in-Charge and Coordinator, Freshwater and Marine Ecosystems Branch, Division of Environmental Policy Implementation presented the Report of the UNEP Executive Director on the Implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan 2009 – 2012, contained in Document IGM 21/3. A brief overview of the activities undertaken since the 20th IGM of COBSEA was presented according to the four components of the *New Strategic Direction for COBSEA 2008-2012*, namely i) Information Management; ii) National Capacity Building; iii) Strategic and Emerging Issues; and iv) Regional Cooperation.

21. She emphasized regional cooperation as well as the extra-budgetary funding raised, noting in particular the efforts by the Secretariat to develop projects with member States, which has enabled COBSEA to undertake activities as mandated in the strategic directions. Three new projects with support from MFF started at the beginning of 2013. She also mentioned the South China Seas Strategic Action Plan (SCSSAP) implementation project Project Identification Form (PIF), which is ready and awaiting country endorsement before submitting to the Global Environment Facility. She further mentioned that, under the information management theme of the strategic directions, the COBSEA website has been revised and enhanced. An environmental outlook report was launched and distributed, and a Marine Biodiversity Outlook was launched at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) 10th Conference of the Parties (CoP 10). She also noted that, while maintenance of the SCS

project website is being undertaken, the financing for this is running out. If the SAP implementation project is approved this valuable information portal can be further enhanced.

22. Capacity building activities included the training carried out through projects including “Spatial Planning in the Coastal Zone – Disaster Prevention and Sustainable Development” supported by Sida as well as “Addressing the challenge of sea-level rise and coastal erosion in the East Asian seas-initial implementation of the COBSEA regional strategy” supported by Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and the Yeosu Expo Organizing Committee. These projects have been well appreciated by participating countries. Regional resource documents on spatial planning and coastal erosion have been prepared, alongside national assessment reports as well as nationally targeted knowledge products. In addressing strategic and emerging issues, COBSEA has been represented at relevant international and regional fora, as identified in the report. Collaboration with the Green Fins initiative continues. Notably, a Memorandum of Understanding between COBSEA and the Korean Environment Management Institute has furthered technical collaboration, including towards the implementation of on-going projects.

23. She emphasized the role of the former COBSEA Coordinator, Elik Adler, in developing and implementing the projects under COBSEA, and thanked him for his dedicated service. Lastly, she brought attention to actions towards implementation of decisions from IGM 20, as contained in the report.

24. The Chairperson invited comments and questions on the report. The Republic of Korea noted with thanks the efforts by the COBSEA secretariat to develop projects, such as activities focusing on coastal erosion implemented with support provided by KOICA and the Yeosu Expo Organizing Committee, and encouraged the COBSEA Secretariat to make further efforts in developing activities addressing climate change in the marine environment. The Secretariat brought attention to the Concept Note contained in information document IGM 21/INF 7, noting that climate change is included there as a key focal area.

25. The Chairperson concluded the discussion by expressing thanks to the Executive Director of UNEP and the COBSEA Secretariat for activities implemented and progress made. He lastly apologized to the meeting for having to leave to attend a cabinet meeting, and requested the meeting Vice-chair Mr. Eng Tiang Sing, Singapore, to preside over the meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 4: SUSTAINABLE FUTURE OF COBSEA

4.1 *Background and introduction of the Sustainable Options document*

26. The meeting Vice-Chairperson invited the Secretariat to introduce Working Document IGM 21/4/Rev.1 “Sustainability Options for COBSEA”, including a background on the current situation of COBSEA and the process through which the Sustainability Options had been developed.

27. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge mentioned that, further to deliberations during the 20th IGM of COBSEA, the Executive Director of UNEP on 26 October 2010 met informally with ministers and other representatives of COBSEA member States that were participating in CBD COP 10 to discuss the critical financial situation of COBSEA. At the meeting, countries agreed to engage an external consultant to conduct an analysis of options on the future sustainability of COBSEA. The consultant carried out an analysis during 2011-12, the report of which is contained in IGM 21/INF 4. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge pointed out that the “Sustainability Options for COBSEA” as contained in IGM 21/4/Rev.1 had been developed by UNEP and the COBSEA Secretariat in part based on the consultant’s report as well as through further analysis and consultation with member States.

28. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge then presented an overview of the four Options contained in document IGM 21/4/Rev.1, including the implications of each option in terms of implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, status of the Secretariat, staffing, and financing secretariat and activities.

Option 1: Status Quo. This would entail continued administration of the COBSEA secretariat by UNEP, with the Secretariat located at UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), as is presently the case. Maintained contributions from member States to the COBSEA Trust Fund would enable staffing of a part time coordinator and an administrative assistant. Through this arrangement COBSEA may serve as a platform for developing and executing projects, such as the GEF South China Sea SAP implementation project. COBSEA could also provide a platform

for dialogue on marine issues. However, she noted that, at present scale of contributions to the COBSEA Trust Fund this option places significant limitations on capacity of the Secretariat to execute its programme of work, which would not enable effective implementation of the Action Plan. Pledges would eventually have to be increased to secure a sustainable platform.

Option 2: A member State offers to host the COBSEA Secretariat. This would entail maintaining the COBSEA secretariat under the auspices of the United Nations, with the host country providing support towards operations of the secretariat, including office and staffing costs. The option would provide for a greater sense of ownership of the Action Plan, it would maintain the benefits identified in Option 1, and also enable use of Trust Fund resources towards activities. The option would require considerable commitment by the host country, as well as by other members.

Option 3: Merger with, or transfer of COBSEA to, another regional organization or institutional mechanism. This would entail transferring the functions of COBSEA to another regional entity, with PEMSEA considered as a possible option. This would enable consolidation of a strong technical programme, which presently has significant financial backing. However, the specific terms of this option would require further detailed analysis, including regarding membership, focal agencies, substantive functions, and administrative aspects. It would also entail a loss of the UN and intergovernmental status of COBSEA as a regional platform.

Option 4: COBSEA Secretariat is hosted by a member State and has non-UN status. This would entail hosting of COBSEA by a member state, outside of the UN system, its rules and procedures, which in itself may enable secretariat operations at a lower cost. This could maintain COBSEA as a platform for delivering a technical mandate through self-funded projects. However, it would also require careful consideration and analysis of the efficacy in implementing the Action Plan, including in terms of garnering political will and project funding as an entity outside the UN system.

29. She concluded her presentation by noting that all options have advantages and disadvantages, different political implications, as well as different consequences for operations and activities. In particular, the status of COBSEA as an entity within or outside the United Nations, maintaining or losing the standards of neutrality, transparency and accountability, as well as the UN convening power and fund raising possibilities, are important consideration in the analysis of the options, as are the financial implications of the different options. Irrespective of the option COBSEA member States agree upon there is a need for strong and shared commitment to the path ahead. Lastly, she stated that UNEP will continue supporting COBSEA and is ready to act on the decisions that member States make.

4.2 Discussion and decisions

30. The Vice-chairperson invited delegates to ask questions for clarification. He also reminded the meeting that common practice for COBSEA is adoption of decisions by consensus. The Legal Adviser, UNEP, pointed out that the Rules of Procedure of the UNEP Governing Council (GC) allows for voting, but that the common practice is consensus decisions.

31. The delegate from the Philippines raised a question regarding the status of COBSEA under option 4. The legal adviser explained that this would be a decision to be made by the member states, and could be as an entity hosted by an existing institution, or alternatively through a treaty signed by all members. The Vice-chair further pointed out that this would entail non-UN status.

32. Responding to a question regarding implementation of GEF project by COBSEA under Option 4, secretariat stated that it would be possible for COBSEA to serve as an executing agency, but that collaboration with a GEF implementing agency would be required. The Vice-chair further added that e.g. PEMSEA, which is set up as a legal person/entity, is receiving GEF funding.

33. Indonesia sought clarification on Option 2, including regarding requirements for a potential host country as well as the duration of country hosting. The Secretariat informed the meeting that hosting requires a host country agreement, which commits the country to relevant UN procedures as well as other applicable conventions e.g. regarding privileges and immunities. It was further pointed out that there is no fixed time frame, this is agreed with the host country in each case, and may be fixed or open ended.

34. The delegate from Cambodia restated the commitment to COBSEA including through enhanced financial support, and suggested a combination of options 1 and 2 as a possible way forward. He pointed out that there are COBSEA members which are also G20 countries and which may have the capacity to host COBSEA. He pointed out that commitment to COBSEA by these countries would also compel other nations to further strengthen their support.

35. The delegate from China stated willingness to work with all other COBSEA member States to find a good solution, irrespective of which of the four options is chosen. She pointed out that the current challenges are due to financial difficulties, but China would not wish to see COBSEA sacrificed as a regional platform for this challenge, which would significantly jeopardize implementation of the Strategic Action Plan in the longer term. UNEP has continuously supported COBSEA and China hopes UNEP will continue to play an important role in COBSEA under the framework of UNEP and the UN, which will give it a greater political weight. While open to all four options, the preference of China is for options 1 and 2.

36. Indonesia stated a preference for option 1, noting that this would require strengthening the financial contributions in the future. However, in view of national budgetary planning this would not be possible in 2013. Revised contributions may be possible from 2014.

37. The Republic of Korea also stated openness to all four options, indicated a preference for either option 1 or 2. Malaysia indicated support for option 1, but also openness to option 2, noting that this would be dependent on discussions on the financial aspects. Philippines stated preference for option 1, and openness to other options except 4. Singapore stated that all options were considered possible, depending on the majority decision, but option 1 preferred. Thailand stated a preference for option 1 but would also support option 2 if a country is prepared to host the Secretariat. Viet Nam stated preference for option 1, with option 3 a second and option 2 a third possibility.

38. Viet Nam inquired about the willingness of the Republic of Korea to host COBSEA. The Republic of Korea responded that hosting the COBSEA secretariat has considerable financial implications, and that resources presently available do not enable a sound hosting arrangement. However, she pointed out that commitment of all members to strengthening COBSEA is a prerequisite for a decision on hosting option.

39. The delegate from Cambodia requested China to consider serving as country host to the COBSEA secretariat. China responded that, if at the end of the meeting, all countries come out with a final decision or a proposal that option 2 is the preferred option, China would like to bring this back to its capital and give it serious consideration.

40. The Vice-chair briefly summarized the discussion by noting that option 1 appears to be the preferred option, with a broad openness to option 2. He suggested to the meeting that Option 2 be discussed further. He also noted that option 2 was the stated preference of several countries. To this end he invited comments from the floor on possible intentions to country hosting of the secretariat.

41. The secretariat suggested a timeline could be set for expressions of interest to host the secretariat, which could be submitted to the Secretariat/UNEP. A deadline for this may be the same as for financial contribution

42. The representative of UNEP pointed out that UNEP is honoured to host the COBSEA secretariat but also noted that it is an exceptional arrangement. It is presently the only Regional Seas programme administered in such a way. Country hosting is seen as a clear indication of ownership. He also noted that NOWPAP, in which both China and the Republic of Korea participate, provides an example of a programme with country hosting by two member states. He also reminded the meeting of the importance on decisions on this issue, noting that the IGM is the only forum where such decisions can be made.

43. Noting the convergence around options 1 as well as 2, the Vice-chair recommended that the option of a participating country hosting the COBSEA Secretariat to be provided by UNEP -the most viable option for the sustainability of COBSEA. It was agreed that governments would submit by 31 May 2013 their expression of interest to host the COBSEA Secretariat, to the COBSEA Officer-in-Charge, who shall circulate the relevant offers to the participating countries for their decision at an Extraordinary Intergovernmental Meeting to be held for this purpose, in case more than one offer is submitted.

44. The resolution in **Annex IV** was adopted by the Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 5: SCALE OF CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE EAST ASIAN SEAS TRUST FUND

5.1 Options for the Scale of Contribution

45. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge presented Document IGM 21/4/Add.1 "Sustainability Options: options for scale of contribution to the COBSEA trust fund". She described the proposed annual budget for the implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan, totaling USD 340,000. She reiterated that the budget had been prepared responding to and based on Resolution 3 of the 20th IGM, as well as based on expenditure during recent years, bearing in mind requirements for maintaining the level of implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan and providing secretariat services for member States in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities under COBSEA. She emphasized that the budget is a minimum requirement, assuming a secretariat administered by the United Nations, and that it includes a very limited allocation for project development and resource mobilization.

46. She further reviewed the three options for contributions by member States to the Trust Fund, as presented in document IGM 21/4/Add.1:

Option 1: Maintain the same allocation percentage as the current scale. Under this option member contributions to make up the minimum budgetary requirements are calculated based on current member contributions. She pointed out that this has its origins in the establishment of COBSEA and the 'willingness to pay' by members.

Option 2: Equal share. Under this option the budget is equally shared among the nine member countries. She pointed out that this is the type of contributions schedule that NOWPAP is moving towards, with current contributions is around USD 125,000 per country per year.

Option 3: Hybrid option based on the common base elements and additional differentiated elements. Under this option a base contribution of at least USD 15,000 is paid by each member country, with an additional contribution calculated based on current contribution level as well as economic status, which is evaluated through the United Nations scale of contribution to the UN regular budget for 2013.

47. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge concluded by stating that the budgetary requirements of COBSEA are dependent on its future form in terms of institutional and secretariat arrangements, and encouraged countries to decide on increased contributions to the Trust Fund bearing this in mind.

5.2 Discussion and decisions

48. The Vice-chair invited comments on the meeting document and the budget and financial contribution options presented.

49. Clarification was requested on whether the contributions options presented correspond to options for secretariat hosting. The secretariat emphasized that this is not the case, and that each option in the contributions paper may be applied to different options in the sustainability paper. The representative of UNEP pointed out that regardless of the decision made regarding hosting of the secretariat, there is a need for a clear decision on increased contributions. Operating on the current budget is not viable. He reiterated that in this regard there is no link between financial contribution options and hosting options. He requested delegations to provide clarification on preparedness and ability to make additional contributions. A question was also raised regarding the calculation of option 3. The secretariat clarified that when the COBSEA TF was created it was as a voluntary trust fund. The UN scale of assessment has been used as a guide for calculating contributions.

50. The need to increase financial contributions was broadly recognized. However, it was noted that increased commitments would require national level confirmation with relevant ministries as well as government approval. Delegates committed to working with their governments to implement decisions of the meeting in this regard.

51. In terms of the contribution options presented in the meeting document, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Malaysia, Indonesia and China stated that option 3 and the indicative contribution scale indicated therein is the preferred option to make up the minimum annual budget of the secretariat. Philippines stated commitment to the level of support indicated in option 2. Singapore reiterated willingness to support the consensus of the meeting. Malaysia pointed out that sufficient time would be required for consultations and decisions at national level.

52. The Vice-chair noted that, since there were no comments on the contribution amounts or the total proposed budget for the secretariat, the assumption is that countries agree on this as a reasonable budget based on careful analysis of actual cost. He thanked delegates for the willingness to consider increasing contributions to the Trust Fund.

53. China recognized the financial challenges of COBSEA and, reiterating the need to increase the contributions, China further reemphasized that revision of financial contributions should be treated seriously.

54. Philippines pointed out that country consultation may need to be conducted with all options on the table, considering that the contribution scale is voluntary.

55. The Vice-chair pointed out that countries had been given 9 weeks to consider contribution options. He thanked the Secretariat for preparing the options as a helpful basis for the discussion. Reiterating that the Trust Fund is voluntary, he encouraged countries to consider what amount can be contributed.

56. The representative of UNEP noted the willingness among countries to strengthen commitments. He also noted that the need for countries to receive government approval was well understood. However, he suggested that delegates may agree on one financial option, which would serve as a basis for national level consultation and approval, since leaving all options open may lead to commitments falling short of the total minimum budget of USD 340,000. If countries define their commitments based on different options the budgetary need may not be met. While it is understood that delegates do not have authority to commit, he suggested it would be better to agree on a contribution scenario. He lastly pointed out that, since these are voluntary contributions, not assessed contributions, a budget for secretariat operations cannot be prepared in the absence of at least an in-principle agreement on total amount.

57. Philippines noted that the understanding is that countries will work towards a total budget of at least USD 340,000. However, it is also clear that some countries may not be able to meet the amounts in the options paper. For this purpose the Secretariat could consult with countries to secure voluntary requirements above and beyond the amounts identified in the options paper.

58. The Vice-chair concluded the discussion by pointing out that several members stated a preference for Option 3, whereas some countries declined to state a preference with regards to contribution option. While this would enable countries to prepare revised commitments he also advised delegates to, where possible, seek to go beyond the minimum figures presented.

59. It was agreed that member states would consult domestically on increasing contributions to the COBSEA Trust fund, notifying the COBSEA secretariat of the results of these consultations and decisions by 31 May 2013. Increased contributions would come into effect from 2014. The chair encouraged countries to seek to conduct such consultation as rapidly as possible and communicating results to secretariat. He also encouraged countries to pay contributions for 2013 to the Trust Fund to enable follow up to decisions of the meeting by the Secretariat.

60. The resolution in **Annex IV** was adopted by the Meeting.

AGENDA ITEM 6: WORKPLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2013-2014

61. The Chairperson invited the Secretariat to present the draft work plan and budget for 2013-2014. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge brought attention to meeting document IGM 21/5, which sets out the proposed programme of work and budget for the biennium 2013–2014 in accordance with the current level financial contributions provided by member States. The workplan and budget focus on continued operation of the Secretariat and implementation of ongoing projects at regional and national level, including the Marine Spatial Planning project, the Coastal Erosion project, as well as three recently initiated projects supported by the Mangroves for the Future initiative.

62. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge explained that proposed activities in 2014 include the organization of the 22nd IGM and regional travel associated with institutional arrangements according to the decisions regarding COBSEA's future taken by member States at the 21st meeting. She also reviewed costs related to Secretariat staffing, and pointed out that budget and expenditure for Secretariat staff was reduced due to the retirement of the Coordinators as well as the freezing of two posts.

63. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge briefly reviewed the Workplan and Budget for 2010-2011 as approved by the 20th IGM, and presented the Financial Report on the East Asian Seas Trust Fund. She pointed out that expenditure during 2012 presented to the meeting were final figures, whereas the interim figures had been included in Document IGM 21/3 pending financial closure of UNEP Accounts. She noted that, during the biennium 2011-2012, the COBSEA Secretariat received significant support from the Environment Fund of UNEP and other funding sources. This was reflected in the level of expenditure charged to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund, which was reduced by approximately 75% during the years 2011 and 2012 compared to previous years.

64. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge stated that, in 2013 and 2014, UNEP will provide considerable in-kind contributions to COBSEA, through time dedicated by different staff members to COBSEA activities and projects. She noted that UNEP provided financial support to the COBSEA Secretariat by financing the cost of the Coordinator (P5 level), partially in 2011 and fully in 2012. She pointed out that the funding leveraged by the COBSEA Trust Fund in 2013 through project funding from donors is estimated at USD 5.32 for every USD 1 contributed by member States.

65. The COBSEA Officer-in-Charge further suggested that Member States may consider creating an open-ended working group on institutional arrangements to operationalize the decisions taken at the 21st Meeting of COBSEA. To this end she also reemphasized UNEP's commitment to supporting COBSEA in the process.

66. Responding to a question from the floor regarding UNEP Environment Fund support to COBSEA, it was pointed out that considerable financial support had been provided in 2012 towards staff costs, the costs of which were reduced in 2013 and 2014 with the retirement of the COBSEA coordinator. The representative of UNEP emphasized that UNEP's support to COBSEA also includes items that are not reflected in the budget, such as technical support by various UNEP officers and travel related to consultations in the lead-up to this meeting, which constitute considerable co-financing. Furthermore, UNEP may, under certain circumstances, provide special allocations to COBSEA from its extra-budgetary resources for specific activities on the ground.

67. The Vice-chair noted that the budget for 2013 and 2014 is based on current contribution. As the meeting agreed a budget of USD 340,000 will be necessary for secretariat operations, the budget will need to be revised as and when country contributions reach the desired level. In this case the first priority would be recruitment of a coordinator as well as liaison with donors to provide activity funding.

68. After a short discussion the workplan and budget for 2013-2014 as presented in Document IGM 21/5 (see **Annex III**) were adopted, with a total budget of 154,000 USD for 2013 and 153,000 USD for 2014. Expenditure incurred in 2012 was also approved retroactively.

AGENDA ITEM 7: OTHER MATTERS

69. The Chairperson invited delegates to raise other relevant matters for discussion in the meeting. No issues were raised.

70. Singapore stated that, while remaining open to all sustainability options, it would support countries proposing to host the Secretariat. Country hosting is of importance for a regional body, and while the current arrangement has been helpful, it is unusual.

AGENDA ITEM 8: DATE AND VENUE FOR THE NEXT MEETING

71. The Chairperson invited suggestions regarding date and venue for the 22nd Meeting of COBSEA, to be held in 2015. It was agreed that the secretariat will revert to members with a suggested date and venue at a later date, pending consultation with members.

AGENDA ITEM 9: ADOPTION OF THE MEETING REPORT

72. The meeting adopted the Report of the 21st Meeting of COBSEA on the East Asian Seas Action Plan.

AGENDA ITEM 10: CLOSURE OF THE MEETING

73. The Vice-chair thanked UNEP and COBSEA Secretariat for organization of the meeting, including their efforts in preparing for and conducting the meeting. He also extended thanks to Thailand as host country of the meeting for the hospitality.

74. Thailand thanked the Vice-chair for presiding excellently over the meeting, helping to ensure steady progress and a good result. He expressed a hope that COBSEA would emerge strengthened as a result of the meeting. He further expressed his gratitude to UNEP and all UNEP and COBSEA staff for organization of the meeting and wished delegates a pleasant stay in Thailand.

75. The representative of UNEP thanked Thailand for the hospitality. He further thanked the chair and Vice-chair for excellent and smooth running of the meeting, and Malaysia for serving as meeting Rapporteur. He thanked UNEP ROAP and COBSEA staff as well as UNEP Headquarters staff who supported meeting preparations. He noted that this was his first COBSEA meeting and that the commitment of member States, including the intent to increase the Trust fund to a sustainable level, was impressive. He wished delegates safe travel back to their countries.

76. The Vice-chair thanked all the delegates that attended the meeting, for the constructive discussion and dialogue and for the efforts made to identify and work towards sustainable institutional, administrative and financial arrangements for COBSEA. He expressed his hopes that COBSEA will increasingly serve its member States well in implementing the East Asian Seas Action Plan.

77. On Tuesday 26 March 2013 at 18:24, the Vice-chair declared the meeting closed.

ANNEX I

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ANNEX II

AGENDA OF THE 21ST INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING OF COBSEA

- 1. Opening of the meeting**
 - 1.1 Welcome address and opening remarks on behalf of the Executive Director
 - 1.2 Introduction of participants
 - 1.3 Presentation of Credentials

- 2. Organisation of the meeting**
 - 2.1 Designation of officers
 - 2.2 Organisation of work
 - 2.3 Adoption of the meeting agenda
 - 2.4 Opening remarks by member countries

- 3. The Executive Director Report on COBSEA Activities 2009-2012**
 - 3.1 Report from the Secretariat

- 4. Sustainable Future of COBSEA**
 - 4.1 Background and introduction of the Sustainability Options Document
 - 4.2 Discussion and decisions

- 5. Scale of Contribution to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund**
 - 5.1 Options for the scale of contribution
 - 5.2 Discussion and decisions

- 6. Workplan and Budget for 2013-2014**

- 7. Other Matters**

- 8. Date and Venue for the next meeting**

- 9. Adoption of the Meeting Report**

- 10. Closure of the Meeting**

ANNEX III

WORKPLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2012 - 2014

Planned Expenditures (expressed in USD 1,000)	Actual 2012	Budget 2013	Budget 2014	Comments
Personnel				
Coordinator	58	30	0	-
Programme Officer	*	0	0	* Post remains vacant and frozen
Administrative Assistant	51	75	78	-
Senior secretary	0	0	0	* Post remains vacant and frozen
Sub Total - Personnel	109	105	78	-
Activities				
Consultant	0	0	0	-
Working Group on Institutional Arrangements	0	7	0	
COBSEA 22 nd IGM	0	0	25	
Travel	0	15	20	Regional travel associated with institutional arrangements
Sub Total - Activities	0	22	45	-
Operational costs				
Rent	0	9	10	-
Office equipment and misc.	0	1	2	-
Sub-Total - Operational	0	10	12	-
Programme support Cost	14	17	18	-
Total	123	154	153	-
UNEP Support to the ESL	177	0	0	Direct Financial Support
	0	95	86	In kind support

ANNEX IV

RESOLUTIONS OF THE 21ST INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING OF COBSEA;

26 MARCH 2013, BANGKOK, THAILAND

Resolution 1: Future Sustainability of COBSEA, Workplan and Budget for 2013-2014

Recalling previous resolutions of the Intergovernmental Meetings related to the financial sustainability for the East Asian Seas Action Plan and its coordinating body (COBSEA);

Bearing in mind our decision, as reflected in the East Asian Seas Action Plan, that the Action Plan is expected to be financially self-supporting through the East Asian Seas Trust Fund or any other approved and appropriate mechanisms;

Acknowledging UNEP's financial, technical and personnel support since the establishment of COBSEA in the provision of Secretariat services to the East Asian Seas Action Plan, the implementation of the Action Plan, the leveraging and raising of funds, and the management of the East Asian Seas Trust Fund; and *conscious of* our expectation, as reflected in the Action Plan, that such support would decrease over the time as we would increase our ownership and responsibility for our agreed Action Plan and its coordinating body;

Recalling also the decision of the 19th Intergovernmental Meeting to review the pledges to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund;

Recognizing the need to strengthen the financial and institutional mechanism in order to ensure COBSEA's sustainability, and being aware of the need for an ample and urgent increase of support and contributions to the Trust Fund;

Desiring to implement the East Asian Seas Action Plan through an enhanced and revitalized COBSEA;

Noting the Report of the UNEP Executive Director on the Implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan 2009 – 2012, submitted to this Intergovernmental Meeting;

The 21st COBSEA Intergovernmental Meeting:

Renews its commitment to the East Asian Seas Action Plan and to its Coordinating Body (COBSEA) as an intergovernmental regional organization that provides guidance and supports member countries in the protection, sustainable development and management of the marine environment and coastal areas of the Seas of East Asia;

Agrees that the option of a participating country hosting the COBSEA Secretariat to be provided by UNEP, is the most viable option for the sustainability of COBSEA; and invites governments to submit by 31 May 2013 their expression of interest to host the COBSEA Secretariat, to the COBSEA Officer-in-Charge, who shall circulate the relevant offers to the participating countries for their decision at an Extraordinary Intergovernmental Meeting to be held for this purpose, if necessary;

Agrees on the proposed target annual budget of US\$ 340,000 for COBSEA as the minimum financial requirement for the maintained level of implementation of the East Asian Seas Action Plan and Secretariat services;

Commits to undertake the necessary consultations at the national level involving the competent authorities on an increment in our pledges, as shown in Appendix 2, so as to enable the Secretariat to meet at least the above mentioned minimum financial requirement, and to inform the Secretariat by 31 May 2013 of our respective government decision in this regard;

Approves the proposed Programme of Work and Budget for 2013, as presented in document IGM21/5, and retroactively authorizes the 2012 budget, as detailed in Table 1 of Appendix 1;

Approves the budget and Programme of Work for 2014 as presented in Table 2 of Appendix 1, and requests the Secretariat to present to the Bureau of this meeting for its approval a revised budget when country contributions reach the desired level;

Appendix 1.

Table 1

Planned Expenditures (expressed in USD 1,000)	Actual 2012	Comments
Personnel		
Coordinator	58	-
Programme Officer	*	* Post remains vacant and frozen
Administrative Assistant	51	-
Senior secretary	0	* Post remains vacant and frozen
Sub Total - Personnel	109	-
Activities		
Consultant	0	-
Working Group on Institutional Arrangements	0	
COBSEA 22 nd IGM	0	
Travel	0	-
Sub Total - Activities	0	-
Operational costs		
Rent	0	-
Office equipment and misc.	0	-
Sub-Total - Operational	0	-
Programme support Cost	14	-
Total	123	-

Table 2.

Planned Expenditures (expressed in USD 1,000)	Budget 2014	Comments
Personnel		
Coordinator	0	-
Programme Officer	0	-
Administrative Assistant	78	-
Senior secretary	0	-
Sub Total - Personnel	78	-
Activities		
Consultant	0	-
Working Group on Institutional Arrangements	0	
COBSEA 22 nd IGM	25	
Travel	20	Regional travel associated with institutional arrangements
Sub Total - Activities	45	-
Operational costs		
Rent	10	-
Office equipment and misc.	2	-
Sub-Total - Operational	12	-
Programme support Cost	18	-
Total	153	-

Appendix 2

COUNTRY	Proposed total contribution (US\$)
Cambodia	15,000
People's Republic of China	60,000
Indonesia	40,000
Republic of Korea	60,000
Malaysia	38,000
Philippines	50,000
Singapore	20,000
Thailand	42,000
Vietnam	15,000
TOTAL	340,000