



**[Draft] Report of the 9<sup>th</sup> MCS Sub Regional (Gulf of Thailand) Group Meeting  
20 June 2024  
Bangkok, Thailand (Virtual)**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

1. The Ninth Group meeting of the MCS Sub Regional (Gulf of Thailand) was held on 20 June 2024 via Videoconference. The meeting was chaired by Thailand and was participated by Cambodia, Malaysia, and Viet Nam. The representative from the Food and Agriculture Organization Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (FAO-RAP) was also invited to be the speaker at the Meeting. The list of participants appeared as **ANNEX 1**.

## **WELCOMING AND OPENING REMARKS**

2. Mr. Choltisak Chawpaknum, National RPOA-IUU Coordinator for Thailand, Director of Fisheries Foreign Affairs Division, Department of Fisheries of Thailand, welcomed delegates as the Chair of the meeting and officially opened the meeting. In his opening remarks, he highlighted the success of previous meetings (2008-2019) in fostering collaboration among parties in the Gulf of Thailand, supported by the SEAFDEC-SIDA project. The focus was on continuing discussions in line with the RPOA-IUU yearly Workplan, reviewing legal developments, and addressing challenges in combating IUU fishing. Future initiatives for the Gulf of Thailand and the Way Forward for 2025 will be discussed. He extended appreciation to RPOA-IUU National Coordinators and FAO-RAP for their ongoing support and made a special mention of the GoTFish Project's alignment with MCS objectives. His opening remarks appeared as **ANNEX 2**.

## **AGENDA ITEM 1: INTRODUCTION AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

### **1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE MEETING**

3. Thailand, as the secretariat of the meeting, provided a brief overview and highlighted its outcomes. It was noted that the Gulf of Thailand (GoT) sub-regional group, supported by the SEAFDEC-SIDA project, held a total of eight meetings from 2008 to 2019 to enhance MCS frameworks and address IUU fishing. Initially, the GoT countries discussed options to strengthen cooperation on monitoring and controlling fishing activities in the region, with an emphasis on MCS activities. The discussions also centered on the cooperation among the GoT countries on transboundary fisheries resources and combating IUU fishing until the latest 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the GoT Sub-region group in September 2019. Significant strides have been made in managing transboundary species, particularly through DNA studies on Indo-Pacific mackerel that confirmed its transboundary nature. Stock assessments for Indo-Pacific King mackerel and Narrow-barred Spanish mackerel revealed their stock status, leading to collaborative management plans. The Fisheries Refugia Project, launched in October 2016, aims to bolster fisheries management and habitat conservation. Selected refugia sites include areas for Indo-Pacific mackerel at the Thailand-Cambodia border. Another key topic discussed was the enhancement of fishing capacity management to further mitigate IUU fishing in the GoT. Each country shared updates on its efforts to manage fishing capacity and combat IUU fishing. An agreement was reached regarding the types of information exchange for each 'M', 'C', and 'S' component of MCS. Potential collaboration will be coordinated through a Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for GoT countries, utilizing the same RPOA-IUU focal point. However, it was noted that following the discontinuation of the SEAFDEC-SIDA Project, this information exchange has been halted. The details of the presentation appeared as **ANNEX 3.**

### **1.2 ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

4. The Meeting adopted the agenda, which appeared as in **ANNEX 4.**

## AGENDA ITEM 2: PRESENTATION

### 2.1 COUNTRY REPORTS (LEGAL FRAMEWORK, MCS, UPDATES, INCLUDING KEY CURRENT MCS ISSUES & CHALLENGES WITHIN THE SUB-REGION)

#### CAMBODIA

5. The Meeting noted Cambodia's presentation on the status of MCS and IUU fishing. Cambodia has implemented marine fishery management measures, including vessel registration, prohibition of illegal fishing gear, and regular patrols in marine fishery management areas. However, Cambodia faces several challenges and opportunities for regional cooperation, including budget limitations, lack of data indicating the stock health, absence of real-time EEZ surveillance, and institutional arrangements for fishing. Additionally, issues include the non-streamlined process of vessel registrations with the issuance of fishing licenses, difficulties in PSMA implementation, and the necessity for MCS training needs assessment. Essential regional training programs on MCS and the shortage of qualified staff for real-time surveillance were also highlighted. The presentation appeared as **ANNEX 5**.

#### MALAYSIA

6. The meeting noted Malaysia's updates on actively enhancing its regulatory framework to combat IUU fishing. Discussions covered the Fisheries Act 1985 and its regulations, the strategic plan of DOFM 2021-2030, licensing procedures, and NPOA-IUU aimed at conservation and sustainable fisheries management. Updates on MCS highlighted legislative revisions of the provisions of the Fisheries Act 1985, revisions to develop the NPOA-IUU Plan No. 2, implementation according to the PSMA, and enhanced inter-agency cooperation through related steering/working committees. Malaysia also pointed out its challenges, such as resource limitations, multi-agency coordination, and legislation, while maintaining relevance and communication with other coastal and flag states, especially regarding the encroachment by their fishing vessels. The conclusion underscored Malaysia's strong domestic laws against IUU fishing and the importance of international cooperation to combat IUU fishing. The presentation appeared as in **ANNEX 6**.

## Thailand

7. The Meeting noted Thailand's presentation on the measures and strategies employed to combat IUU fishing. Key highlights include 1) Legal Framework Update, where Thailand is amending the Royal Ordinance on Fisheries to elevate it to an Act, ensuring comprehensive input from stakeholders; 2) MCS where Thailand has had a Fisheries Monitoring Center (FMC) since 2017, serving as the intelligence section to control Thai-flagged fishing vessels and foreign vessels in Thai waters. Additionally, Thailand utilizes Electronic Monitoring (EM) and Electronic Reporting Systems (ERS) to control Thai overseas fishing vessels. The Meeting acknowledged Thailand's efforts and encouraged continued collaboration in combating IUU fishing using the ASEAN Network for Combating IUU Fishing (AN-IUU) interactive platform to facilitate regional cooperation. The presentation appears as in **ANNEX 7**.

## Viet Nam

8. The meeting noted Viet Nam's presentation on the work of the Department of Fisheries and Surveillance, highlighting its organizational structure, legal framework, and recent amendments to the Fisheries Law. Viet Nam has made significant progress in implementing the MCS system. Notable achievements include port control and monitoring of landings at ports, marking of fishing vessels, and establishment of a national database on fishing vessel registration and fishing licenses.
9. Challenges remain, such as VMS signal transmission issues, the need for better risk assessment for fishing fleet management and legal framework enforcement, and difficulties in collecting evidence and information about violations of its fishing vessels in foreign waters. Viet Nam also recommended sharing and exchanging more information related to MCS and PSMA among RPOA-IUU Participating Countries and capacity-building for effective fisheries law enforcement. The presentation appears as in **ANNEX 8**.

### Agenda 3: Opportunity

10. The Meeting noted the overview and current status of the Project “Promoting the Blue Economy and Strengthening Fisheries Governance of the Gulf of Thailand through the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (GoTFish Project)” presented by FAO-RAP’s representative, Miss Angela Lentisco. The project aims to enhance natural resource governance in the GoT countries by implementing the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF), contributing to the fisheries objectives of the South China Sea Strategic Action Program (SCS-SAP).
11. Miss Lentisco highlighted the importance of the Gulf of Thailand Large Marine Ecosystem (GoT LME) for food security, nutrition, and livelihoods. She emphasized that issues that remain in the GoT region include overexploitation of resources, use of non-selective fishing gears, and IUU fishing, emphasizing the need for sustainable and coherent measures to conserve the ecosystem and biodiversity.
12. The GoTFish project builds on existing work and initiatives, including previous projects like the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, MCS Regional Work, FAO/GEF REBYC II Bycatch, and ongoing modeling on the Gulf of Thailand by CSIRO. It also incorporates social aspects such as gender issues and labor, as well as private sector initiatives related to sustainable fisheries practices.
13. The project is structured into four components:
  - 1) **Regional transboundary fisheries governance and management:** Strengthening regional cooperation and governance to restore fisheries resources and marine biodiversity.
  - 2) **Alignment of incentive mechanisms:** Promoting sustainable fisheries through suitable incentives that reduce ecosystem stress and support climate resilience.
  - 3) **Ecological corridors (Malaysia):** Integrating habitat and biodiversity conservation into fisheries management, with a specific focus on Malaysia.
  - 4) **Project monitoring, knowledge management, and stakeholder engagement:** Ensuring effective communication, stakeholder involvement, and consideration of gender issues throughout the project.

14. Miss Lentisco also mentioned the innovative approach of the project, including the development of EAFM for complex multispecies fisheries, ecosystem modeling, and the use of the IUCN Green List for protected areas management. The project is currently awaiting approval from Malaysia and Vietnam, with the inception phase expected to start in Quarter 4 of 2024. The presentation appears in **ANNEX 9**.

#### **Agenda 4: 2025 Recommendation and Way Forward Development**

- 4.1 **Identify key MCS issues/ challenges that can be addressed at the sub-regional level.**

- 4.2 **Development of the 2025 Recommendation and Way Forward**

15. The meeting agreed to discuss Agenda items 4.1 and 4.2 together to identify key MCS issues and challenges that can be addressed at the sub-regional level and to define the recommendations and the way forward. Thailand, as the secretariat of the meeting, circulated “The Country Comment and Input Template” to gather insights and suggestions from the GoT countries. Fourteen major points of key MCS issues and challenges were identified. The meeting had extensive discussions on each key MCS issue/challenge, recommendation, and way forward. As a result of these discussions, the 2025 Recommendation and Way Forward for the sub-regional Gulf of Thailand, as agreed by the meeting, are detailed in **ANNEX 10**.

#### **Agenda 5: Other Business**

16. No topics were discussed under this agenda item.

#### **Agenda 6: Next Meeting/ Host country, Chair and Secretariat**

17. The meeting discussed the rotation of hosting duties, including the roles of the Chair and the Secretariat. Thailand proposed that the host country of the meeting be rotated in alphabetical order. For the next meeting, the chair and secretariat duties will be managed by the host country of that year. This arrangement ensures smooth coordination and facilitates the transition for the upcoming host. The meeting may be organized as a teleconference or a physical meeting, depending on the host country’s decision.

18. Therefore, Viet Nam is expected to host the 10<sup>th</sup> MCS Sub-Regional (Gulf of Thailand) Group Meeting in 2025, with Cambodia in 2026 and Malaysia in 2027. Initial discussions on this matter took place during the RPOA-IUU ATS Workshop in Bali in 2023.
19. However, the meeting suggested referring to the framework of the Sub-Regional Meeting on the Southern and Eastern Areas of the South China Seas and the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas (SESCS-SSS) of the RPOA-IUU, which has clearly defined this matter in the form of terms of reference (TOR). Thailand agreed to develop the TOR and host the 10<sup>th</sup> MCS Sub-Regional (Gulf of Thailand) Group Meeting in 2025 before the meeting is held on a rotational basis.

#### **Agenda 7: Finalization of Meeting Report**

20. The meeting agreed to adopt the report of the 9<sup>th</sup> MCS Sub-Regional (Gulf of Thailand) Group Meeting, along with the 2025 Recommendation and Way Forward document, as a referendum. Thailand, as the secretariat, will draft the report and circulate it by July 2024 for review by the GoT participating countries.

#### **Closing**

21. Mr. Choltisak Chawpaknum, the Chair, expressed his sincere gratitude to all delegates for their enthusiastic participation and valuable contributions throughout the meeting, which led to productive outcomes. He then officially concluded the meeting. His closing remarks appeared as **ANNEX 11.**

**List of Annexures**

Annex 1 - List of Participants

Annex 2 - Opening Remarks

Annex 3 - Background of the meeting

Annex 4 - Adopted Agenda

Annex 5 - Cambodia Presentation

Annex 6 - Malaysia Presentation

Annex 7 - Thailand Presentation

Annex 8 - Vietnam Presentation

Annex 9 - FAO Presentation

Annex 10 - 2025 Recommendation and Way Forward Development

Annex 11 - Closing Remarks