

SPECIAL REPORT

Establishment of MCS networks in the Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea sub-regions by SEAFDEC Secretariat

Upon the endorsement of the Regional Plan of Action to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Region in May 2007 in Bali, Indonesia, the cooperation to combat IUU fishing in Southeast Asia had been strengthened, especially towards the establishment of Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (MCS) networks in the sub-regional areas of the Southern and Eastern of South China Sea and Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, Gulf of Thailand, and Arafura-Timor Seas. As a regional fisheries R&D which also promotes the sustainable development of fisheries in the region, the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) works closely with the RPOA-IUU in strengthening the MCS networks as tool to combat IUU fishing in the waters of Southeast Asia.

In order to complete the draft matrix of MCS needs and potential actions for the Gulf of Thailand, SEAFDEC through the SEAFDEC-Sida Project (forerunner of the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project) collaborated with the Department of Fisheries of Thailand and organized the Sub-regional Meeting on the Gulf of Thailand in 2008 which considered the need to establish regional/sub-regional MCS system/network by developing national MCS systems recognizing that MCS functions could be useful in improving data collection within the region and among the countries. Such recommendation to establish the regional cooperation on MCS network was supported by the ASEAN high-level officials' commitments as indicated in the "Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region Towards 2020" which was adopted at the 2011 ASEAN-SEAFDEC Conference on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security Towards 2020 "Fish for the People 2020: Adaptation to a Changing Environment" and subsequently endorsed at the 33rd Meeting of ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) also in 2011. Specifically, Plan of Action No. 22 encourages the ASEAN Member States to "Establish and strengthen regional and sub-regional coordination on fisheries management and efforts to combat IUU fishing including the development of regional/sub-regional Monitoring, Control, and Surveillance (MCS) networks."

The renewed support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in 2013 through the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project "Fisheries and Habitat Management, Climate Change and Social Well-being in Southeast Asia" boosted the efforts of the ASEAN Member States (AMSs) to implement regional and sub-regional

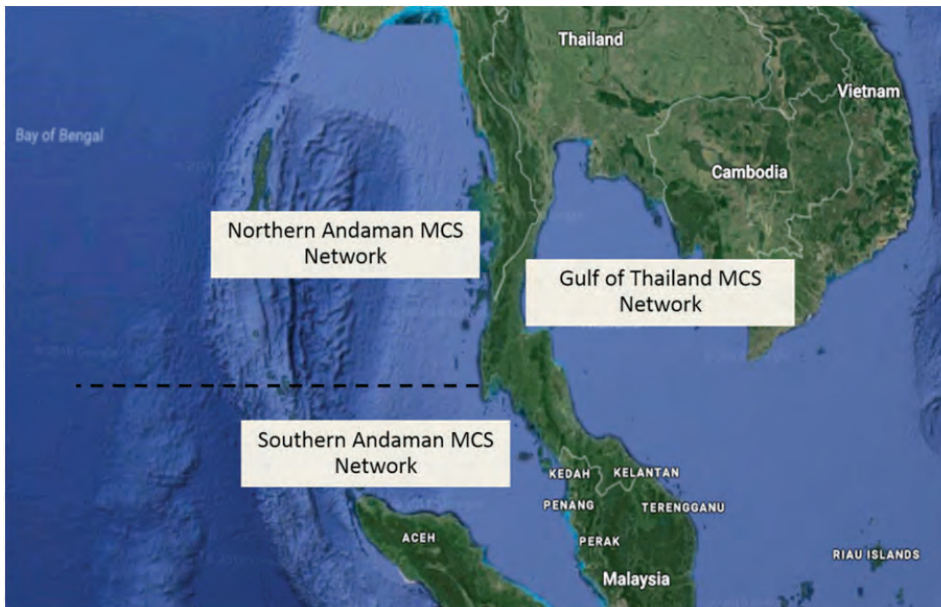
actions by building upon the momentum of the RPOA-IUU in addressing initiatives towards sustainable fisheries development and combating IUU fishing. In particular, the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project emphasized on the regional and sub-regional cooperation among the AMSs by facilitating the exchange of fisheries related data for the purpose of enhancing cooperation within MCS networks and on fisheries management. In general, the AMSs strengthened their support to combat IUU fishing through the regional MCS networks, where MCS is defined by FAO as:

- **Monitoring (M)** includes the collection, measurement, and analysis of fishing and related activities - but not limited to catch, species composition, fishing effort, bycatch, discard, areas of operation, etc.; this type of information provide primary data to use for decision making.
- **Control (C)** involves specific terms and conditions under which resources can be harvested. These specifications are normally contained in national fisheries legislations and other arrangements that might be nationally, sub-regionally, or regionally agreed. The legislation provides the basis for which fisheries arrangements, via MCS, are implemented.
- **Surveillance (S)** involves checking and supervision of fishing and related activities to ensure that national legislations and terms, conditions of access, and management measures are observed.

In principle, the benefits of strengthened coordination in sub-regional MCS networks could include:

- expressed support for the implementation of UNCLOS/UN Fish Stock Agreement, Port State Measure Agreement;
- improved product traceability and certification;
- improved data for stock assessment;
- experience gained and knowledge shared in combating IUU fishing;
- improved management of shared stocks;
- enhanced knowledge of regulations in neighboring countries among fishers and control agencies; and
- reduced surveillance costs (as these could be shared among concerned countries).

When the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project organized the Sub-regional Consultation on the Development of MCS in the Gulf of Thailand in 2017, the concerned countries agreed to: 1) coordinate in combating IUU fishing through enforcement of the MCS network in accordance with existing national mechanisms; 2) develop a sub-regional MCS network as a



Map showing the sub-regional MCS cooperation areas under the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project

major force to keep track of the implementation of fisheries management plans that could positively reduce long-term damages on fish stocks and marine ecosystem; and 3) collaborate with responsible agencies to secure the mandate and approach for the establishment of the sub-regional MCS network to be linked with existing national networks. These were also confirmed for the Andaman Sea Sub-region (Northern and Southern Sea Sub-sub-regions). Nevertheless, the establishment of such cooperation should take into account the national rules and mandates of agencies involved such as departments of fisheries, environmental agencies, port authorities, customs, trade promotion, immigration, transport, and labour as well as the maritime enforcement authorities (navy, coastguard, marine police or similar entities). As there are already existing national coordination groups established for inter-agency coordination in the AMSs, the development of sub-regional MCS network could build upon the activities these groups through strengthened cooperation.

The expected outcomes of the sub-regional cooperation through the MCS networks could include: (i) improved verification and certification of legal status of catch/

landing and fishery products; (ii) enhanced effectiveness of sub-regional/ bilateral coordination for facilitating trade and improve product traceability; (iii) improved scientific assessment for transboundary species; and (iv) new coordination body/cooperation for MCS linked through the existing cooperation on surveillance. These could be realized through the National Technical Groups for MCS established in each AMS, comprising members responsible for the development of information collection mechanism, and collaboration with agencies and institutions involved in the national MCS network.

Furthermore, based on the recommendations during the sub-regional meetings, any sub-regional agreements should not be legally binding but could be built on mutual trust recognizing the mutual benefits gained, but should take into consideration the national legal systems of concerned countries. In addition, agreements could also be established for sharing of data/information that are mutually useful and which would simplify the national fisheries management processes (e.g., scientific data, trade verification data, among others). ❖



Participants of the Southern Andaman Sea MCS Meeting



Group discussion during the MCS Network Meeting 2019