

# Building upon Sub-regional Arrangements for Joint Management of Fishery Resources in the Southeast Asian Region

Magnus Torell

The Southeast Asian region embraces among others, a vast range of seas including semi-enclosed seas, large rivers and lakes, numerous man-made lakes and reservoirs, and wide areas of wetlands and flooded forests. For the sustainability of the fisheries in these waters, many fora had recommended that sub-regional approach should be promoted to develop joint and/or coordinated management of the resources. Under the ASEAN mechanism, six sub-regional management areas had been identified in the Southeast Asian region. These are: Gulf of Thailand, Andaman Sea, South China Sea, Sulu Sea or Celebes Sea, Arafura Timor Sea, and Mekong River Basin. Through these sub-regional areas as targets of suitable sub-regional arrangements, regional collaboration in the ASEAN could be enhanced. The SEAFDEC-Sida Project implemented in 2000s and subsequently, the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project (2013-2019) has been promoting the development of sub-regional arrangements for the sustainable management of the fishery resources in the Southeast Asian region, focusing on the Gulf of Thailand, Andaman Sea, Sulu-Sulawesi Sea, and Lower Mekong River Basin. To date, sub-regional arrangements have been initiated among the transboundary countries of these sub-regional areas, resulting in the establishment of collaborative agreements for improved management of fisheries and habitats, as well as improvements in the quality and legal status of fish and fishery products from the Southeast Asian region.

## Sub-regional focus in support of processes for common approaches to ASEAN fisheries management

Fisheries and fishery resources utilization is of central importance in all regions of the world that are blessed with productive marine and inland water bodies. Fisheries, with a mix of smaller and larger scale operations, is a common feature in many regions worldwide, most especially in the Southeast Asian region. The available aquatic resources is generating opportunities for employment, livelihood and food security for coastal and rural communities as well as providing raw materials for fisheries-based industries that contribute significant export earnings to the coastal countries. In addition, inland river basins like the Amazon, the Nile and the Mekong provide sources of livelihoods, employment and food security for millions of people dependent on the aquatic products.

The world's growing population with increasing demand for fish and fishery products together with pollution and habitat degradation, and competition over space along coasts and inland river basins has led to the recognition among nations that rules and regulations has to be established – and enforced – to manage fisheries, regulate fishing efforts, and to conserve and protect the habitats and aquatic environments. The migratory nature of fish stocks, seasonal variations in river flows, and the effects of seasonal changes in climate patterns go beyond national boundaries. Throughout the world there are calls for bilateral and multilateral agreements on fisheries and habitat conservation with strengthened coordination to jointly work towards sustainable utilization of the fishery and aquatic resources.

In the European Union (EU) for example, support of common efforts to ensure sustainable fisheries and protection of important habitats, common fisheries policies had been developed and agreed upon within the EU. The Common Fisheries Policy is revised and renewed from time to time with gradually stronger and more restrictive provisions. The first Common Fisheries Policy was introduced in the 1970s with the latest one that entered into force on 1 January 2014 ([https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/fisheries/cfp_en)). An important feature of the European Fisheries Policy is the sub-regional focus for negotiation on detailed management measures such as regulations of fishing effort with catch allocations to be shared among the bordering countries in dialogue between the EU and non-EU states. Important sub-regions in the EU include the Baltic Sea (EU States and Russia), the North Sea (EU States, Norway, Iceland and Faeroe Island), and the Mediterranean Sea.

Similar to Europe, fisheries and habitats are under increasing pressure in the Southeast Asian region with very strong national and regional dependence on fish and fishery products both for domestic food security and in support of highly profitable export industries. Millions of people are directly involved in and are dependent on fisheries and fisheries-related activities. Countries like Thailand, Indonesia, Viet Nam and the Philippines are among the world's leading exporting countries in terms of fish and fishery products. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation has been growing and improvement of management measures has been promoted through the efforts and support of the Southeast Asia Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC) and through the ASEAN Sector Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGF).

In November 2007, SEAFDEC, with support from then SEAFDEC-Sida Project as the forerunner of the *SEAFDEC-Sweden Project*, organized the *ASEAN-SEAFDEC Regional Technical Consultation on the Concept of an ASEAN Fisheries Development and Management Mechanism (AFMM)*. The event and subsequent discussions among the ASEAN Member States (AMSs) led to the establishment of the ASEAN Fisheries Consultative Forum (AFCF), now meeting annually back-to-back with the meetings of the ASWGF. Based on the interest shown during the Senior Officials Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers of Agriculture and Forestry (SOM AMAF) in 2016 to develop a common fisheries policy, the Department of Fisheries in Thailand responded positively by hosting the “*Technical Consultation on Development of the ASEAN Common Fisheries Policy*” on 27-28 March 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants included representatives from the fisheries agencies of the AMSs, private sector representatives from the AMSs together with the ASEAN Secretariat, SEAFDEC, FAO and other international and regional organizations. During the said Technical Consultation, there was a general understanding that further steps should build upon the existing policy frameworks, e.g. the *2011 ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region towards 2020*, and directions for the continued process should be provided through the available ASEAN mechanisms. Another important initiative that has been developed for the region in response to global and increasingly regional, demands to ensure the legal status of fish and fishery products is the “*Regional Plan of Action (RPOA-IUU) to Promote Responsible Fishing Practices including Combating Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing in the Region*”. The RPOA-IUU is endorsed by eight of the AMSs plus Australia, Timor-Leste and Papua-New Guinea. FAO, SEAFDEC, InfoFish, and the WorldFish Center are providing technical advice to the RPOA-IUU. Common to these regional initiatives, which are under a general umbrella of region-wide perspectives, is that specific sub-regional focus should be given to the development of joint or coordinated management plans for fisheries and habitat management, management and control of fishing efforts, and strengthening of the cooperation on monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) to be able to verify and certify the legal status of the fisheries, thereby reducing levels of illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing.

For several decades, the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project had given specific attention to the most important sub-regions of the Southeast Asia, i.e. the Andaman Sea, Sulu-Sulawesi Sea, Gulf of Thailand, and the Mekong River Basin due to the uniqueness of these sub-regions in terms of resource abundance, biodiversity, social and cultural importance, ecological significance of global importance, and as major source of economic revenues. In order to have a solid platform for the development of an ASEAN Common Fisheries Policy, it is vital to build upon the existing sub-regional initiatives to

promote the perspective of improved management of fisheries, habitats and improvements in quality and legal status of trade in fish and fishery products for the region as a whole.

## The important transboundary marine and inland sub-regions in Southeast Asia

In the Southeast Asian region, six transboundary marine and inland sub-regional areas are of vital importance to the socio-economic make-up of the region because of their unique social, ecological and economic characteristics.

### Gulf of Thailand Sub-region

The Gulf of Thailand is by the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) definition, considered as a semi-enclosed sea. The Convention encourages countries around the Gulf of Thailand to cooperate to ensure that the available resources are sustainably utilized and the environment is protected. Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam and the South China Sea are bordering the Gulf of Thailand (Fig. 1), which is made up of a fairly shallow basin of not more than 85 meters in depth. In the upper part of the Gulf, a range of rivers such as Chao Phraya, Bang Pakong and Mae Klong brings nutrients into the Gulf that contribute to high productivity leading to abundance and diversity in fish and other aquatic resources. The increasing populations and growing demand for fishery products in the region and at international markets, had led to the rapid increase in fisheries operations in the Gulf of Thailand with the growth of sizeable larger scale fishing fleets found in Thailand, Malaysia and Viet Nam.

The combined fishing effort of the traditional coastal small-scale fisheries and the large-scale fisheries has led to increased fishing pressure and serious over-fishing in the Gulf of Thailand with significant decreases in catch per unit effort. Parallel to the over-fishing and depletion of resources, the



Fig. 1. The Gulf of Thailand Sub-region bounded by Thailand, Cambodia, Viet Nam, Malaysia, and the South China Sea

Gulf has also been subjected to degradation of its marine and coastal environment with many habitats being threatened, such as mangroves, sea grass beds and coral reefs. Following urban and industrial developments, the levels of pollution has increased substantially, and together with large expansions of tourist developments, coastal resorts and several concessions for gas and oil exploration, have led to competition over space and resources in the Gulf and along its coast. The livelihood and well-being of coastal communities are being challenged due to the depletion of resources and the rapidly decreasing space available for the fishing communities. The situation has led to conflicts between groups of fishers and between fisherfolk, the fishing industry and other sectors demanding for space and exploiting the resources in the Gulf of Thailand.

To mitigate the problems and in effort to work together on the management of fisheries, habitats and fishing capacity, the Gulf of Thailand countries with support from SEAFDEC through the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, had since 2008 regularly met to discuss common issues and approaches to address the problems and to reverse the negative trends through the development of joint approaches to fisheries management and habitat protection. The SEAFDEC-Sweden Project is not being implemented in isolation but in cooperation with relevant local institutions, *e.g.* Learning Institute of Cambodia (Leng *et al.*, 2013). Important contributions to the identification of important habitats with measures to develop *refugia* for the management and conservation of habitats are provided by the SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF Gulf of Thailand and South China Sea Fisheries *Refugia* Project (Peterson and Yingyuad, 2017).

### Andaman Sea Sub-region

The Andaman Sea is an ecologically unique semi-enclosed sea bordered by Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal (Fig. 2). The topography of the Andaman is more varied compared to that of the Gulf of Thailand, having a large continental shelf in the northern part and in Myanmar. In the central to southwestern part approaching towards the Malacca Straits there is a deep basin with depths down to 2000 meters. The seasonal variations from the north-west monsoon and the south-east monsoon together with the unique topographical patterns of the Andaman Sea, create specific patterns of currents with distinct rip-currents occurring where the water masses meet. These seasonal patterns together with nutrients outflow from rivers such as the Ayeyarwady and Salween supports very productive habitats making the Andaman Sea extremely rich in both biodiversity and abundance of aquatic resources. The Andaman Sea has also seen a rapid increase in fishing activities by small and especially through the growth in fishing by larger scale vessels leading to over-exploitation of commercially important species (SEAFDEC, 2017) such as mackerels, anchovies, neritic tunas, and hilsa. Seasonal closure in specifically sensitive areas and during spawning seasons could help to allow stocks to recover.



Fig. 2. The Andaman Sea Sub-region bounded by Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Andaman and Nicobar islands, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of Bengal

The ecological significance, biodiversity, resources abundance and scenic beauty has led to much attention being drawn towards the Andaman Sea not only from the fishing sector but also from coastal tourism that has been supporting a multi-billion dollar industry – and creating problems for coastal communities in terms of competing demands for space in coastal areas. Earlier negative impacts on the marine and coastal environments was caused by the extensive dredging of alluvial tin, but changes in world market prices and increased popularity of coastal tourism has led to shift in investments from tin dredging to tourism. The ecological uniqueness of the Andaman Sea has led to the establishment of the *Andaman Sea Eco-region* through nomination by environmental groups like the WWF ([assets.panda.org/downloads/wwfandaman2.pdf](https://assets.panda.org/downloads/wwfandaman2.pdf)) based on the identification of Andaman Sea as one of the most important eco-regions of the world with calls for specific and strong measures to be imposed to ensure the protection of its ecological values. Information provided (<https://www.worldwildlife.org/ecoregions/im0101>) on the ecological features of the Andaman Sea indicate that there are distinct variation between the northern Andaman compared to its southern part with the dividing “line” being somewhere close to the latitude of Phuket.

Other similar patterns, with one northern “loop” and one southern “loop” has been reported with regards to traditionally important pelagic species such as the Indo-Pacific mackerel and short mackerel (SEAFDEC, 2012). Even if the details need to be confirmed through continued research and assessment, it is obvious that coordinated fisheries and habitat management efforts are required and should be developed between the two countries of the northern Andaman (Myanmar and Thailand), the three countries of the southern Andaman (Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand) and the four (five if including India) countries of the Andaman Sea. The coordination should be developed with reference to the ecological features, seasonal monsoon patterns, habitat connectivity and fisheries migration, and trans-boundary movements of vessels and landings across boundaries.

The ecological, cultural, economic and social importance of the aquatic and fishery resources of the Andaman Sea to the countries and the sub-region as a whole has also been highlighted with support being provided to strengthening of sub-regional cooperation on fisheries and habitat management through the FAO/BOBLME Project, IUCN/Mangroves for the Future (MFF) and the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project. In addition numerous initiatives are ongoing at national level in the four or five Andaman countries together with sizable private sector investments in fisheries, tourism, offshore oil-explorations, harbors, and industrial estates, among others

**(Northern) South China Sea/Gulf of Tonkin**

The political boundaries of the South China Sea are highly disputed with basically all littoral states have claims to parts of the South China Sea including the disputed Parcel and Spratly Islands (**Fig. 3**). Following the uncertainties and political tensions the South China Sea is not, for the time being, the target for regular sub-regional dialogues on fisheries, fisheries management and habitat conservation by the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, RPOA-IUU or other fisheries initiatives with sub-regional focus. The SEAFDEC/UNEP/GEF South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand *Refugia* Project have a focus on the South China Sea but habitat demonstration sites are located close to shore well within “undisputed” territorial seas. Nonetheless, in the Gulf of Tonkin cooperation is ongoing between China and Viet Nam. The South China Sea and Gulf of Tonkin are bordering Viet Nam, People’s Republic of China, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia and the Gulf of Thailand in the Southwestern part.

The coastal fishery resources and type of fishery in the northern South China Sea and Gulf of Tonkin Sub-region, with a mix of smaller and larger scale fisheries, have similar features as that of the Gulf of Thailand and the Andaman Sea with heavy pressure on the resources in the northern part and along the coasts. Seasonal variations follow the changes in the monsoon seasons supported by the outflow of nutrients from the Mekong River, Red River and other major rivers



Fig. 3. The Northern South China Sea and Gulf of Tonkin Sub-region bounded by Viet Nam, People’s Republic of China, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, and Gulf of Thailand

with estuaries and deltas in and around the South China Sea, providing ideal patterns for the spawning, breeding and feeding for important fisheries stocks – and the basis for significant artisanal and commercial fisheries. Discussions on fisheries in the northern part (Gulf of Tonkin) had been going on between China and Viet Nam with the establishment of a fisheries agreement between the two countries on fisheries in the Gulf of Tonkin, which entered into force on 30 June 2004.

**Sulu-Sulawesi Seas**

The Sulu-Sulawesi Seas are known to be very rich in biodiversity with great abundance of coastal and offshore resources with some 3,000 aquatic species. Important habitats include tuna breeding and spawning grounds, and marine turtle nesting areas. There are limited areas with shallow water and the bottom topography shows fairly deep water areas with 80% of the area between 200 and 5,000 meters deep. The Sulu-Sulawesi Seas are enclosed by Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia (**Fig. 4**). The uniqueness and global significance has promoted WWF and others to establish the Sulu-Sulawesi Eco-region.

Support to the eco-region has, apart from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), been provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), US Agency for International Development (USAID), and the German Development Agency (GIZ) among others. The cooperation around the Sulu-Sulawesi has been further expanded through the establishment of the “*Coral Triangle Initiative for Corals, Fisheries and Food*”



Fig. 4. The Sulu-Sulawesi Seas bordered by Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia

*Security*” (CTI-CFF). The CTI-CFF is established as an intergovernmental body with six members, namely: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste, Papua-New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands. The availability of bountiful fishery resources in the Coral Triangle (Fig. 5) has attracted people to engage in fisheries with the aquatic resources being threatened by increased fishing pressure due to population growth leading to heavy over-exploitation including the use of destructive fishing methods. Furthermore, the resources, habitats and unique ecosystem of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas are threatened by impacts of coastal development, urbanization and other (human) activities. Fluctuations in sea temperature and acidification together with more frequent and intense storms and hurricanes caused by climate variability and climate change adds to problems caused by fisheries and other human activities.

The Sulu-Sulawesi Seas is another target sub-region for the RPOA-IUU with the inclusion of the fishing areas in the southern and south western South China Sea. Regular meetings are organized with the involvement of Brunei Darussalam with results being reported to the annual RPOA-IUU Coordinating Committee. The SEAFDEC-USAID Oceans Partnership Project with a focus on aspects related to the implementation of traceability systems and biodiversity have identified the Sulu-Sulawesi Sub-region as the main

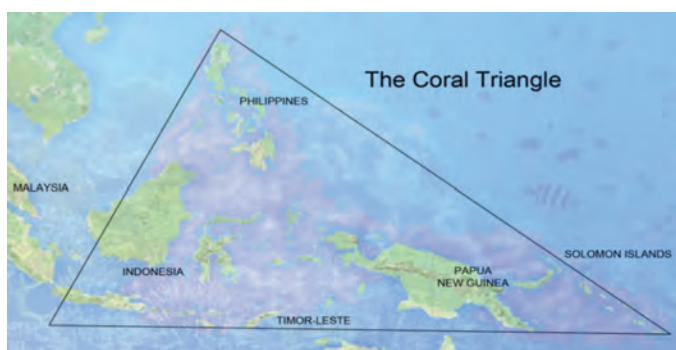


Fig. 5. The Coral Triangle bordered by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea, and Timor Leste

area for their activities. The Sulu-Sulawesi is also a target sub-region for the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project but with the actions implemented by the CTI-CFF and the SEAFDEC-USAID Oceans Partnership Project, the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project is only monitoring the progress in the area with options to share results from the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas with other areas.

### Arafura-Timor Seas

The Arafura-Timor Seas are rich in aquatic resources and bio-diversity with productive coastal resources together with a larger and smaller pelagic fish species. The Arafura-Timor Seas are bordered by Indonesia, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea and Australia, and by the 1982 Law of the Sea definition, the sub-region is also a “semi-enclosed” sea (Fig. 6). The fisheries of the area have two distinct features, namely: (1) coastal traditional fisheries; and (2) larger commercial vessels including foreign vessels with licenses to fish in the area, primarily fishing for larger tunas. The picture of the sub-region’s fishing pressure is mixed with some species and resources under heavy pressure while in other cases and areas, some resources are not fully exploited. The mixed picture includes areas with conflicts among groups of fishers and encroachment of larger vessels into coastal areas creating problems for coastal traditional fisherfolk.



Fig. 6. The Arafura-Timor Seas bordered by Indonesia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, and Australia

Challenges with regards to management of fisheries include illegal fishing, trans-boundary encroachment together with uncertainties as to the actual fishing pressure due to many fisheries, especially the small-scale traditional fisheries being unregulated with unrecorded catches. Efforts are needed, and gradually being implemented, to support the coastal artisanal fisherfolk by securing their traditional rights and strengthened tenure rights to coastal lands with access to resources and fishing areas. Given that tunas and other larger pelagic species are well managed and controlled, the sub-regional area has a large export potential. To move in this direction and to combat illegal fishing, the bordering countries need to work together

and share information, and to cooperate on monitoring, control and enforcement. The Arafura-Timor Seas is one of target sub-regions for the RPOA-IUU. The cooperation in the area is often cited as a good example of effective cooperation on control of fishing effort in a given sub-region. To strengthen the cooperation on monitoring and control, the arrangements and development of MCS-networks are based on a sequence of bilateral agreements, such as between (a) Timor-Leste and Australia; (b) Indonesia and Australia; and (c) Papua-New Guinea and Australia.

### Mekong River Basin

The Mekong River Basin (Fig. 7) is very rich in aquatic resources and biodiversity, and second in the world only to the Amazon River Basin (Fig. 8). Estimates by the Fisheries Program of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) indicates an annual fisheries production of 2.5 – 3 million tons, with around 60 million people in six countries dependent on the Mekong and its resources. The productivity of the Mekong River depends on the seasonal monsoon patterns with high fluctuation in rain fall, water levels and water turbidity. The wet season reverse flow of the Tonle Sap River and the growth of extended flood plains are triggering fish migration and spawning that, together with maintained connectivity between important habitats are central to the productivity of the Mekong.



Fig. 7. The Mekong River Basin bordered by People’s Republic of China, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam



Fig. 8. The Amazon River Basin in South America covers an area of about 7,500,000 km<sup>2</sup> or roughly 40% of the South American continent, and bordered by Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, and Venezuela.

Riparian states of the Mekong River Basin include Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and People’s Republic of China. The productivity of the river and potentials for navigation, hydropower and irrigation schemes had been the focus for cooperation among riparian states dating back well into the French colonial Indo-China era. In the mid-sixties the predecessor of today’s Mekong River Commission (MRC) started to emerge with ambitions to look into options for “developing” the Mekong River Basin and harnessing its resource potential for hydropower and irrigation, among others. In 1995, the four countries of the Lower Mekong Basin, namely: Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Lao PDR signed the “*Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin*” and the MRC was established. In response to the importance and uniqueness of the Mekong River Basin, the MRC and efforts to strengthen cooperation among riparian states, received support from major donors since its inception.

Seen from a fisheries perspective, the support being provided by the Governments of Denmark and Sweden since the 1980s to the Interim Mekong Committee and later (after 1995) to the MRC Fisheries and Environment Programme has been important in increasing the awareness of stakeholders on the value and productivity of fisheries in the Mekong River Basin. Further information on fisheries as well as on the economic and social importance of the Mekong fisheries has been generated through the WorldFish Center, WWF Greater Mekong, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)-(Mekong, Wetland Alliance, the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), and others.

In spite of all the available information and the awareness raised in the four countries and globally on the importance and value of Mekong fisheries and the uniqueness of Mekong River Basin biodiversity, the sustainability is challenged by infrastructure developments, e.g. hydropower and irrigation dams, roads, urban development, housing and industrial estates, that are reducing the flood plains, obstructing migration paths, losing the connectivity, and altering the river flows. As a result, river developments pose the major threats to Mekong fisheries and not the fisheries as such. In order to reverse negative trends, it is important that the continued seasonal flooding and the seasonal reverse flow of the Tonle Sap River are ensured, and the habitat inter-connectivity with open fish migration paths together with conservation of dry season fish refuges are maintained to secure sufficient fish broodstocks.

In 2016, the MRC had revised their program structure and all the former “sector” programs, including the fisheries program, were closed. In the new program structure, the aspects on fisheries are now incorporated in the work-plan of the new Environmental Program but without the staff capacity and funds available to support the old fisheries program. This has led to concerns being expressed considering that the continuous monitoring of status of fisheries resources with reporting on the health of important habitats would now be lost. Challenges ahead include the need to maintain the inter-governmental monitoring of the status of fisheries, habitat conservation and maintained inter-connectivity. In this respect, SEAFDEC as the main fisheries intergovernmental organization of the region, could assume a role to ensure that the regular monitoring of Mekong fisheries and threats facing the fisheries and people can be maintained and reported in cooperation with fisheries agencies of the Mekong countries. This can be done in cooperation with SEAFDEC and MRC based on a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2017.

## Moving Towards the ASEAN Fisheries Policy

Strengthened sub-regional cooperation with development of joint or coordinated fisheries management plans including research and studies on the social, ecological and economic importance of fisheries and aquatic resources utilization needs to be promoted. This would point at, and increase the understanding of, the very strong national and regional dependence on fish and fishery products both for domestic food security, employment opportunities for millions of people and in support of the very profitable export industries. Improved and coordinated management and environmental protection is also a prerequisite for sustainability. Strong recognition of the local, rural and coastal importance of fisheries and harvesting of aquatic resources is, or should be, an important part of the ASEAN community-building. In this context, similar to the situation in Europe, it is critical to build upon the specific fisheries patterns and traditions of the defined sub-regions. To move in this direction, efforts to promote the further development of an “*ASEAN Common*

*Fisheries Policy*” should be based on the growing bilateral and multilateral cooperation on the efforts to improve fisheries, management measures, habitat protection with coordinated monitoring and control of fishing effort. The steps taken by SEAFDEC with support from the SEAFDEC-Sweden Project, RPOA-IUU, UNEP/GEF Gulf of Thailand *Refugia* Project should be recognized and reported to the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGF) as well as to the ASEAN platforms addressing the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint.

There still seems to be some hurdles to pass on the way to finalize and adopt a “common fisheries policy”. Some of the difficulties might be with language used as sometimes objections are raised on the reference to “common fisheries” and to overcome that, the policy directions possibly need to be framed differently. However, further steps towards more coordinated fisheries policies should build upon existing policy frameworks, and that continued policy discussions should refer to the *2011 ASEAN-SEAFDEC Resolution and Plan of Action on Sustainable Fisheries for Food Security for the ASEAN Region towards 2020* with directions for the continued process to be provided through the available ASEAN mechanisms. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that “*to have a solid platform for the further development of an ASEAN Common Fisheries Policy, it is vital to build upon existing sub-regional initiatives to promote the perspective of improved management of fisheries, habitats and improvements in quality and legal status of trade in fishery products for the ASEAN region as a whole.*”

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## About the Author

Dr. Magnus Torell is the Special Advisor of SEAFDEC based at the SEAFDEC Secretariat in Bangkok, Thailand.