

GoTFish: Promoting sustainable use of the Gulf of Thailand fishery resources through the Blue Economy and the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries

A proposal for the GEF International Waters Focal Area

Marine

The Gulf of Thailand (GoT) Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) is well recognized for its important habitats and abundance of aquatic resources. It is a global centre of shallow water marine biological diversity. Together with the neighboring South China Sea LME, it provides one of our most productive marine ecosystems. Natural resource use of these LMEs provides a wide variety of marine products in support of livelihoods and food security to the large populations inhabiting the surrounding landscape but also significant exports for those Countries. The fishing sector and related activities in the GoT provide significant livelihood, food security and nutrition to the peoples of the countries of Viet Nam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Malaysia.

Inadequate governance and fisheries monitoring are identified as two primary threats to the GoT, resulting in unsustainable fishing pressures, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) and competition with other users of the coasts and the sea (e.g. tourism, aquaculture and gas and oil exploitation) that are degrading this globally important LME and diminishing the ecosystem services upon which the GoT communities depend. For example, the economic losses for Asian fisheries under current governance arrangements is estimated to be as high as 55 billion USD/year¹. Urgent action is required to assist the bordering countries to manage their shared resources of the Gulf of Thailand and to implement collaborative fisheries management for transboundary stocks (e.g. important commercial species such as anchovy, Indo-pacific mackerel and blue swimming crab).

The proposed project² aims to contribute to the implementation of the Strategic Action Programme for the South China Sea (SCS-SAP) by improving the governance of the fishery resources of the Gulf of Thailand³ through the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) to strengthen its Blue Economy potential. Working with partners and stakeholders across the region, the project will support the creation of an enabling environment to end IUU and overfishing, focusing on collaboration and cooperation among the four GoT countries to achieve the sustainable management of fisheries resources. In addition to governance support and policy reform, measures will include the implementation of transformative market mechanisms to support

¹ World Bank. 2017. The Sunken Billions Revisited

² The project will build upon a process set in motion by the Gulf of Thailand Sub-regional group organized under the SEADFEC Sweden-funded initiative.

³ In coordination with the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the South China Sea (SCS), which also includes interventions for the Gulf of Thailand.

sustainable value chains, through private sector engagement and working on the elimination of incentives that are harmful for the aquatic ecosystem.

The proposed project will comprise the following four components (*under discussion*):
Gender considerations will be explicitly integrated in all 4 components.

Component 1: Strengthening regional governance and management for the sustainability of fisheries resources in the Gulf of Thailand

The project will support activities under the following priority areas:

- The development of sub-regional fisheries management advisory group/arrangements for improved trans-boundary and shared stock management (key species – e.g. neritic tuna, mackerels, anchovies, and blue swimming crab).
- The recognition of policy and legal fisheries frameworks across the GoT countries (including EAFM).
- Holding multi-stakeholder sub-regional task forces for addressing key regional issues (sub-regional measures to address IUU fishing, PSMA, MCS, VMS, etc.).

Component 2: Enhance the implementation the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (and relevant approaches) in the Gulf of Thailand

The project will support activities under the following priority areas:

- Implement the Blue Economy concept and the EAF through the development collaborative fisheries management plans (FMP) and Fisheries Improvement Plans
 - o The EAF management plans (focused on priority fisheries and their value chains, at regional and national levels) will identify and address priority risks to human well-being, ecosystem well-being and governance, supporting public-private partnerships to ensure sustainability from within. They will also include integrated M&E systems.
 - o Increase the capacity of the GoT stakeholders to address trans-boundary fisheries issues, such as those related to inadequate fisheries management (overfishing, overcapacity, IUU fishing, by-catch, ALDFG, lack of adequate fisheries information systems, etc.) fisheries livelihoods (poverty, gender, labor and other social issues), as well as market inefficiencies (inefficient subsidies, post-harvest losses, etc.).
 - To address these issues, the project will make use of existing agreements, approaches, and tools such as: the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-scale fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Alleviation, the FAO Port State Measures Agreement and other related international instruments, Fishing vessel registration systems, Catch documentation schemes and other traceability mechanisms, Information, Communication and Technology (including for Small-scale fisheries), etc.

- The FM plans will also incorporate an evaluation mechanism based on adaptive management to review the development and implementation process of the FMP, as well as capacity gaps (knowledge, financial, technological) for its implementation and for its monitoring and review process.
- Strengthen the fisheries sector's ability to address key areas of action in the GoT, such as capacity development to strengthening Monitoring Control and Surveillance frameworks, undertake gender assessments, etc., and also support other cross-sectoral initiatives within the Gulf of Thailand, such as marine spatial planning, integrated coastal zone management as well as issues relating to marine pollution.

Component 3: Develop incentive mechanisms to support the transition to sustainable fisheries

- Strengthen links between the public and the private sector.
- Support the implementation of market mechanisms to enhance sustainable fisheries value chains.
- Support the development and/or implementation of standards for sustainable fisheries and aquaculture to enhance marine ecosystem health alongside economic and social sustainability, and improve food and nutrition security;
- Address reporting and transparency needs required related to unrestricted international trade
- Test and promote innovative positive incentives to promote sustainable sourcing of fish and aquatic products, as well as the transition to low impact fishing practices.
- Analyze harmful incentives promoting unsustainable fishing practices and develop measures to address them and move towards sustainability.

Component 4: Knowledge management and communication

- Project monitoring program established and under implementation
- Communication and information management systems established
- Policy and outreach communications developed and communicated to national and regional stakeholders
- Participation in the activities of the IW Learn Project

Potential Partners:

Governments of Cambodia Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam

SEAFDEC: Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center and related projects (e.g. the Fisheries Refugia project, and the SCS SAP Implementation Project)

UN Agencies (FAO, UN Environment, ILO, IMO)

NGOs (SFP, FFI, WWF, IUCN, MFF as well as national NGOs)

Universities and research centers across the region (e.g. UQ, World Fish)
CSO's (e.g. Thailand Sustainable Development Foundation and others)
Representatives from input suppliers and processors
Private Sector (e.g. Thai Union and also small-medium enterprises)
Trade organizations/associations