



GEF/UNDP/ASEAN PROJECT ON REDUCING POLLUTION AND
PRESERVING ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS IN THE EAST ASIAN SEAS
THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED RIVER BASIN
MANAGEMENT (IRBM) IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

Proceedings of the First Regional Steering Committee Meeting

**Manila, Philippines
17 February 2023**



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Executive Summary

The First Regional Steering Committee (RSC) meeting of the **GEF/UNDP/ASEAN Project on Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in the East Asian Seas through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management in ASEAN Countries (IRBM Project)** was held on February 17, 2023 in hybrid format, i.e., in-person component at Park Inn by Radisson in Manila, Philippines and via video conference (Zoom). The meeting was attended by the Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM); National Focal Points (NFPs) of the AWGWRM of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines and Viet Nam; representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok Regional Hub and UNDP Country Office in Indonesia and Lao PDR and the East Asian Seas Executive Committee (EAS EC). The Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU), hosted by PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF), served as Secretariat to the RSC.

The RSC meeting reviewed the results and recommendations from the Regional Inception Workshop that was held on February 16, 2023, the project governance and management arrangements, and the 2023 work plan and budget and procurement plan. The meeting also discussed the date and venue for the next RSC meeting and the immediate next steps to fast track project start-up and implementation.

The RSC meeting generally agreed with the results and recommendations from the Regional Inception Workshop taking into consideration the clarifications made at the meeting to facilitate project implementation. The project governance and management arrangements and the 2023 work plan and budget and procurement plan were approved subject to further refinements in accordance with the results of the national consultations and MOA (Memorandum of Agreement) negotiations.

The RSC meeting agreed on the following next steps:

- RPMU to prepare and circulate the Draft Inception Report and Proceedings of the First RSC Meeting to the RSC members and National Implementing Partners (NIPs) for review.
- PRF to send official communications to the participating countries with the draft MOA, national work plan and budget and Terms of Reference of the IRBM Project National Coordinator for review.
- RPMU to initiate the conduct of regional activities while the countries are in the process of reviewing the MOA, work plan and budget and TOR of the IRBM National Project Coordinator.

- UNDP and RPMU in coordination with ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) to update the Project Results Framework, governance and management arrangements and the 2023 workplan and budget incorporating the results and recommendations from the Regional and National Inception Workshops for further circulation to the RSC.
- RPMU to convene the Ad-hoc RSC meeting in the third quarter of 2023 to review and agree on the amended Project Results Framework and indicators and to receive feedback from countries post national inception meetings.

Subject to the approval of the Ministry of Environment of Cambodia, the next RSC meeting will be convened back-to-back with the 24th Meeting of AWGWRM in Cambodia in 2024.

Introduction

- i. The First Regional Steering Committee (RSC) meeting of the GEF/UNDP/ASEAN Project on Reducing Pollution and Preserving Environmental Flows in the East Asian Seas through the Implementation of Integrated River Basin Management in ASEAN Countries (IRBM Project) was held on February 17, 2023 in hybrid format, i.e., in-person component at Park Inn by Radisson in Manila, Philippines and via video conference (Zoom).
- ii. The RSC meeting was attended by the Chair of the ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management (AWGWRM); the National Focal Points (NFPs) of the AWGWRM of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Philippines and Viet Nam; representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok Regional Hub and UNDP Country Office in Indonesia and Lao PDR and the East Asian Seas Executive Committee (EAS EC). The AWGWRM NFPs of Indonesia were not present due to the recent designation of the Director of Water Pollution, Directorate General of Environmental Pollution and Degradation Control of the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) as AWGWRM NFP, thus requiring internal discussion within MoEF on the coordinating arrangements for the project.
- iii. The Regional Project Management Unit (RPMU), hosted by PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF), served as Secretariat to the RSC.
- iv. The list of participants is given in **Appendix A**.

Opening of the Meeting

- i. Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, Chair of the AWGWRM welcomed the participants to the RSC meeting over Zoom. He highlighted the importance of the meeting in line with the recently concluded Regional Inception Workshop where the results and recommendations will be presented to the RSC for review and approval. Dr. Akkharath called for the strong support and continuing commitments of the AWGWRM NFPs to implement the project in their respective countries and requested the ASEC and PRF to facilitate the coordination process. Dr. Akkharath acknowledged and expressed appreciation to UNDP for chairing the First RSC meeting.

- ii. Dr. Keita Furukawa, Technical Session Chair, EAS EC, expressed his appreciation for the invitation to the EAS EC to serve as member of the RSC. He emphasized the importance of the project in linking river basin management and integrated coastal management and its contribution to achieving SDGs 6 and 14 and in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). Dr. Furukawa cited that since the IRBM Project and SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2027 share the same timeline, the accomplishments of the project are anticipated to benefit the SDS-SEA.
- iii. Ms. Tharuka Dissanaiké, Regional Technical Advisor, Water and Oceans Governance, Nature, Climate and Environment Team, UNDP Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, chaired the RSC Meeting on behalf of the Director, UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub. Ms. Dissanaiké emphasized that the First RSC meeting is critical in setting up project implementation. With the approval of the governance arrangements and 2023 work plan and budget, it will signal the official start of project implementation.

1. Adoption of Meeting Agenda

- 1.1 The Meeting adopted the agenda, as presented (**Appendix B**).
- 1.2 The RSC meeting documents, presentations, photos and other reference materials can be accessed at [First RSC meeting](#).

2. Summary and Recommendations from the Regional Inception Workshop

- 2.1 Ms. Nancy Bermas, Regional Project Manager of the IRBM Project, presented the summary and recommendations from the Regional Inception Workshop held on February 16, 2023, focusing on the following key topics, for consideration of the RSC:
 - a) monitoring and evaluation milestones and requirements;
 - b) project results framework;
 - c) project governance arrangements;
 - d) 2023 work plan and budget, and
 - e) next steps.
- 2.2 Details of the discussions and recommendations from the Regional Inception Workshop can be gleaned from the Inception Report (**Appendix C**).

Discussion Highlights and Decisions

2.3 Project Results Framework

- Indicator 5 calls for the engagement of local governments and private sector partners in source-to-sea resilience issues. The challenge of translating and measuring “resilience” was raised which may need to consider several aspects of the source-to-sea system/river basins including resilience of the ecological and social systems, infrastructure, the length of recovery of the systems, among others, which cannot be measured within the project’s timeline. Alternative terminologies, i.e., “long-term and sustainable measures” that can be easily understood can be considered.
- Indicator 6 requires the preparation of 10-year river basin strategy and action plan. Clarification was made that during the project preparation phase, an assessment of the governance mechanisms (i.e., institutional arrangement, strategies, policies and plans) related to river basin management in the participating countries was conducted to determine areas for strengthening and complementation. The project is designed to build upon existing initiatives and will support the process leading to the development, adoption and implementation of the strategies and actions plans in support of the government’s priorities for integrated management of river basins and adjacent coastal areas. Moreover, the 10-year river basin strategy is seen as one of the mechanisms for sustaining the agreements beyond the project life, including leveraging partnerships and investments to implement the plan. The project will provide technical assistance to operationalize the governance arrangements to implement the plan.
- **Decision:** The RSC recognized the need to keep the indicators simple, measurable and flexible to reflect on-the-ground situation in each country. Countries will convene the national inception workshops/consultations to clarify and define the indicators, as maybe applicable and relevant to the countries, in consideration of existing policies and regulations of the governments. As a follow up, UNDP and RPMU will consolidate and incorporate the necessary adjustments to the Project Results Framework as recommended by the countries, share the draft to ASEC and the countries before convening the Ad Hoc RSC to review and approve the amended Project Results Framework. UNDP will report back to GEF the amendments made on the Project Results Framework in the first Project Implementation Review (PIR) for this project which is due in September 2024.

2.4 River Basin Coordinating Committee

- The importance of establishing the RBCC as platform for multistakeholder engagement and as an oversight mechanism for project implementation was recognized. Its establishment will depend on the country's processes and must consider existing mechanisms in the countries/river basins with similar composition and functions that were established based on government's directives. Creating new committees may take time given its multisectoral nature and the need for a supporting regulation for its establishment. The project can therefore consider building on existing mechanisms with a view of promoting ownership and sustaining the project's contribution on institutional strengthening for IRBM in the participating countries.
- **Decision:** A nationally determined process of establishing the committee will be considered, which will require the countries to convene consultations to discuss and define the form (i.e., Kedah River Basin Stakeholders Committee) and composition in alignment with national and river basin processes while referring to the Terms of Reference, as provided for in the Project Document in delineating the functions of the committee. A guideline that will define the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholder groups that were identified in the Stakeholder Analysis in the Project Document will also be prepared.

2.5 Next steps

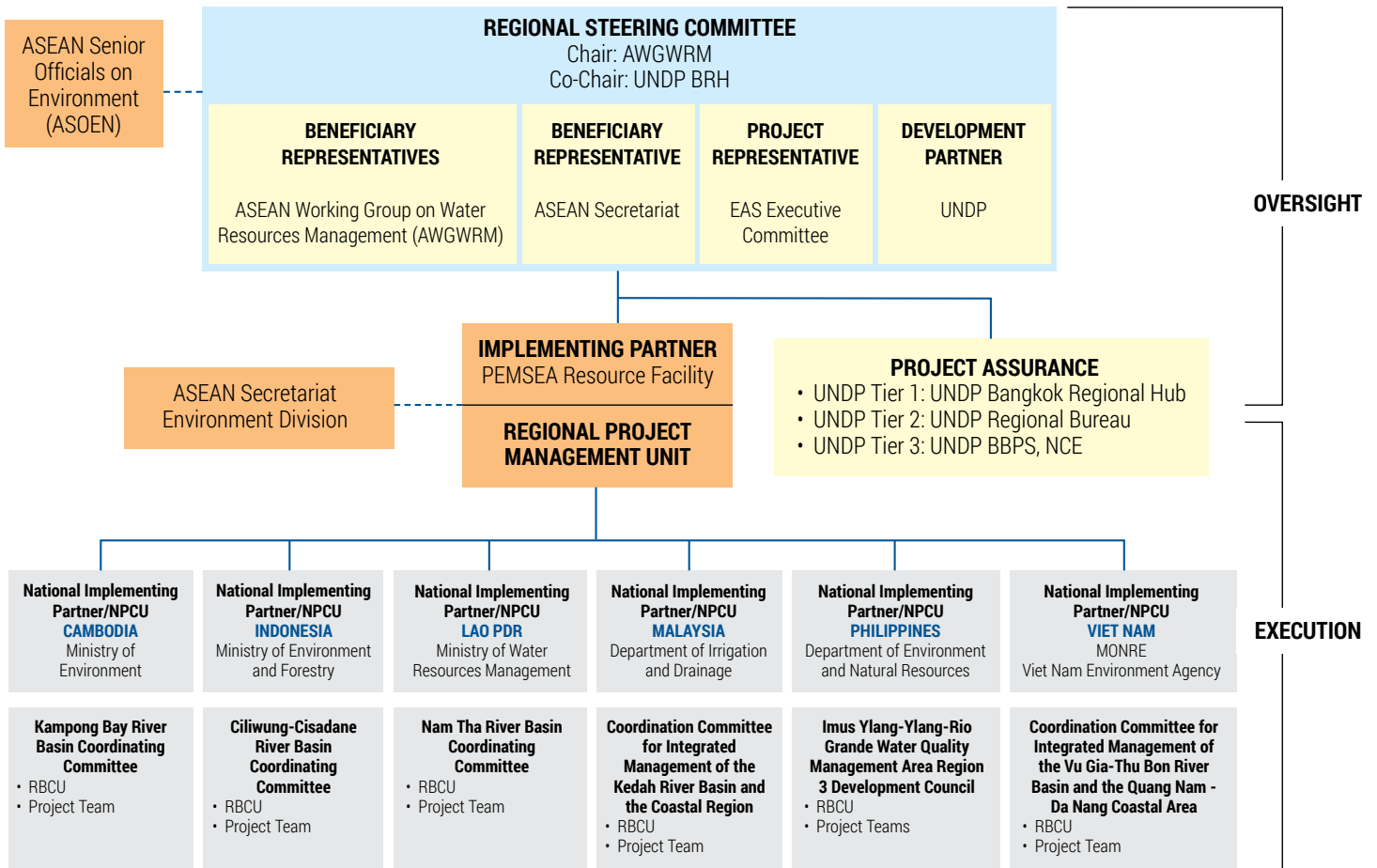
- Cambodia requested for a formal communication from PRF to be addressed to the General Directorate of Environmental Protection of the Ministry of Environment with the Draft MOA and TOR of the IRBM Project National Coordinator as attachments.
- The AWGWRM of Lao PDR will organize a meeting with the relevant Ministries to discuss the project, including the conduct of the National Inception Workshop. A formal communication was likewise requested from PRF to be addressed to DWR with the Draft MOA and TOR as attachments.
- In Indonesia, while the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (MoEF) is undergoing internal discussions on the project's implementing arrangements, RPMU will initiate bilateral in-person meetings with MoEF with the engagement of ASEC-Environment Division (ED) to discuss the developments on the project, including communicating to them the recommendations and decisions from the RSC.

- The Philippines will convene a consultation workshop involving relevant agencies to seek consensus on the project implementing arrangements. PRF was requested to send a formal communication to DENR with the Draft MOA and TOR of the IRBM Project Coordinator as attachments.
- Malaysia requested for a formal communication from PRF to be addressed to the Director General of the Department of Irrigation and Drainage (DID) apprising DID on the recommendations of the RSC on fast tracking project implementation in the countries. The draft MOA and TOR for the IRBM Project National Coordinator can be included for review by DID during the consultation process on the project implementing arrangements, which the RSC noted will require 3 months to be completed.
- Viet Nam, through the NFP for AWGWRM, will apprise MONRE on the recommendations and decisions from the RSC and will advise RPMU accordingly when the formal communication can be sent after the decision from MONRE on the designation of the NIP will be announced.
- **Decision:** RPMU to send formal communications to Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and the Philippines on the third week of February with the draft MOA, workplan and budget and TOR of the IRBM National Project Coordinator for review and wait for advice from Viet Nam when the communication can be sent to the NIP. RPMU to initiate the implementation of regional activities while the countries are in the process of reviewing the MOA and TOR.

3. Review and Approval of the Project Governance and Management Arrangements

- 3.1 Ms. Tharuka Dissanaïke presented the IRBM Project Governance and Management Structure, as shown below, highlighting the composition and oversight function of the RSC, UNDP's 3-tier project assurance function, the representation of the NIPs and RBCCs at the execution level and ASEC ED's coordination support to the RPMU, which serves as the Secretariat of the RSC. She emphasized that in general, UNDP, ASEC, RPMU and the countries are in agreement with the expanded project governance structure.

Expanded IRBM Project Governance Structure



Discussion Highlights and Decisions

3.2 Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam suggested the following modifications:

- Cambodia: Add the Department of Water Quality Management under the Ministry of Environment.
- Lao PDR: Add the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment and amend the Department of Water Resources Management into Department of Water Resources.
- Malaysia: Modify the Coordination Committee for Integrated Management of Kedah River Basin and the Coastal Region into Kedah River Basin Stakeholder's Committee.
- Vietnam: Retain MONRE and delete Vietnam Environment Agency at the national level and add Da Nang People's Committee and Quang Nam Provincial People's Committee at the river basin level.

- 3.3 The ASEAN Secretariat highlighted the importance of close internal communication and coordination among the AWGWRM NFPs, NIPs and RBCCs in each participating country to facilitate the smooth implementation of the Project.
- 3.4 **Decision:** The RSC approved the IRBM Project Governance Structure and the proposed amendments. The structure will be further updated after the conduct of national consultations.

4. Review and Approval of 2023 Work Plan and Budget and Procurement Plan

- 4.1 Ms. Nancy Bermas presented the 5-year workplan and budget showing the allocations per component and on an annual basis and the 2023 work plan and budget and procurement plan.

Discussion Highlights and Decisions

- 4.2 Discussions and clarifications on the work plan and budget focused on the following:
- The 6 countries have equal budget allocations of USD 737,400 for Components 1 to 3 and is distinct from the regional budget and tax/value-added tax inclusive.
 - Budget re-allocation based on GEF and UNDP requirements is allowed within the same component while re-allocation between components is allowed up to 10 per cent of the total budget. Budget can be moved from one budget item to another within the same component. Introduction of new budget items is allowed up to 5 per cent of the total budget. To avoid audit findings, changes in budget allocations (i.e., introduction of new budget items without budget allocations in the approved work plan and budget), which can be undertaken at least twice a year must be approved by UNDP and properly reflected in the revised budget.
 - There is no prescriptive reporting for fund utilization for national and local/river basin activities. The NIPs in consultation with the RBCCs can manage the local budget allocations in line with the approved work plan and budget.

- Where possible, keep the budget allocations within the components. It is anticipated that the 2023 budget may not be fully utilized as the project implementing arrangements are being discussed and finalized. Revisions can be made in 2024 and 2025 depending on the fund utilization rate in 2023.
- Detailed discussions on the work plan and budget will be pursued during the national consultation/inception workshops to identify the activities and level of funding that can be allocated using the GEF grant, including the co-financing commitments of the national and local governments for project implementation (e.g., office supplies, operation of the National Project Coordinating Unit, etc.). The MOA, which includes provisions on the responsibility of the national and local governments in the operations of the coordinating units at the national and river basin levels, will also be subject to negotiations in consideration of the scope of activities that the GEF grant can cover.
- The representative from Viet Nam indicated the potential difficulty in meeting the timeline for the project in view of the long approval process of the Government. The implementation of project activities can only be initiated once the NIP is officially designated.

4.3 **Decisions:**

- The RSC approved the overall workplan and budget for 2023 subject to possible amendments based on the results of the national consultations/inception workshops.
- RPMU to initiate and carry out regional activities, and possibly increase the regional budget for the activities, while the countries are in process of reviewing the MOA, work plan and budget and TOR of the IRBM National Project Coordinator.
- RPMU to convene an Ad-hoc RSC meeting in the third quarter of 2023 to review and approve the revised budget for 2023, which incorporates the recommendations from the national consultations and MOA negotiations.

5. Other Business

- 5.1 No other business was covered in the RSC meeting.

6. Date and Venue of Next RSC Meeting

Discussion Highlights and Decisions

- 6.1 RSC meetings, as indicated in the Project Governance Structure, will be held preferably back-to-back with the annual meetings of the AWGWRM. ASEC informed the RSC that the 24th Meeting of the AWGWRM will be hosted by Cambodia based on the alphabetical rotation of hosting the meeting. ASEC will coordinate with Cambodia in early 2024 on the proposed date of the meeting, which is usually convened in the second quarter before the ASEAN Senior Officials on Environment (ASOEN) meeting.
- 6.2 **Decision:** AWGWRM NFPs of Cambodia to report to MoE and seek approval from the MoE Minister to host the IRBM Project RSC meeting back-to-back with the 24th Meeting of the AWGWRM. RPMU to send an official communication to MoE inviting Cambodia to host the 2024 RSC meeting in conjunction with the AWGWRM meeting.

7. Meeting Recommendations and Next Steps

- 7.1 The RSC noted the following immediate next steps and recommendations from the meeting:
- PRF to send official communications to the participating countries with the draft MOA, national work plan and budget and TOR of the IRBM Project National Coordinator for review.
 - RPMU to adopt a 2-step process in preparing the Inception Report. The first step will document the results of the Regional Inception Workshop and the second step will cover the results of the National Inception Workshops incorporating the revisions to the Project Results Framework and 2023 work plan and budget.
 - RPMU to prepare and circulate the Draft Inception Report and Proceedings of the First RSC Meeting to the RSC members and NIPs for review.
 - RPMU to initiate the conduct of regional activities while the countries are in the process of reviewing the MOA, work plan and budget and TOR of the IRBM National Project Coordinator.

- RPMU to establish a mechanism for review and assessment of committed co-financing by the countries, including new sources and types, for discussion during the national consultations.
- UNDP and RPMU in coordination with ASEC to update the Project Results Framework, governance and management arrangements and the 2023 workplan and budget incorporating the results and recommendations from the Regional and National Inception Workshops for further circulation to the RSC.
- RPMU to convene the Ad-hoc RSC meeting in the third quarter of 2023 to review and approve the amended Project Results Framework, governance and management arrangements and 2023 work plan and budget.

8. Closing of the Meeting

- 8.1 Dr. Keita Furukawa, Technical Session Chair, EAS Executive Committee congratulated the members of the RSC for the successful conduct of the meeting. Dr. Furukawa highlighted the importance of local stakeholders' commitment and that the project should ensure their involvement in project implementation. He underscored the need to accommodate science-based discussions and expressed the commitment of PEMSEA and its networks (e.g., PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers) to support such discussions.
- 8.2 Ms. Sengphasouk Xayavong, Department of Water Resources, Lao PDR delivered the closing message of Dr. Inthavy Akkharath, Chair of the AWGWRM. Dr. Akkharath expressed his appreciation to PRF, UNDP and ASEC for the successful organization and conduct of the meeting, and the NFPs of the AWGWRM for their participation in the meeting. He enjoined PRF, UNDP, ASEC and the AWGWRM for their continuing cooperation in the implementation of the project and beyond.
- 8.3 Ms. Natalia Derodofa, Senior Officer, Environment Division, ASEAN Secretariat, congratulated everyone for the successful meeting and looks forward to the implementation of the project.
- 8.4 Mr. Phin Rady, Director of Water Quality Management Department, MoE Cambodia expressed his gratitude to GEF, UNDP, ASEC and the PRF for the conduct of, and the fruitful results from the Inception Workshop and RSC meeting. Mr. Phin is hopeful that the project will support IWRM, IRBM and climate change efforts at the sub-national

and national levels in the country. He expressed his commitment and full support in the successful implementation of the project based on the agreed project results framework.

- 8.5 Ms. Chindavanh Souriyaphack, Department of Water Resources, Lao PDR thanked UNDP, ASEC and PRF for the organization of the Inception Workshop and the RSC meeting. Ms. Souriyaphack mentioned that DWR will work closely with PRF to prepare for the national implementation of the project.
- 8.6 Dr. Asnor Muizan bin Ishak, Senior Principal Assistant Director, Division of Water Resources and Hydrology, DID, Malaysia thanked the organizers and colleagues from other countries for the very good discussion during the Inception Workshop and RSC meeting. Dr. Asnor indicated that he will discuss the results of the meeting with DID and develop the work flow, and plan for the conduct of national consultation.
- 8.7 Dr. Seville David, Jr., Executive Director, National Water Resources Board, Philippines, concurred with the presented summary and decisions of the RSC meeting. Dr. David likewise emphasized the importance of the national inception workshop as venue to discuss the project implementation arrangements in the Philippines.
- 8.8 Ms. Tran Thi Le Anh, Senior Officer, Vietnam Environment Pollution Control Agency, MONRE, Vietnam indicated that she is in agreement with the decisions of the RSC. Ms. Tran reiterated her concern on long approval and endorsement process of the Government which may impede the timely implementation of the project in Viet Nam.
- 8.9 Ms. Aimee Gonzales, Executive Director, PRF thanked everyone for the very productive discussion. Ms. Gonzales thanked the PRF team, UNDP and ASEC for the very professional organization and conduct of the meeting. She thanked the countries and Dr. Keita Furukawa for their valuable inputs and comments and urged the partners for their full cooperation for the successful implementation of the project.
- 8.10 Ms. Tharuka Dissanaiké, expressed her appreciation to the countries, on behalf of UNDP, for the engaging discussions. She reminded the meeting that the project contributes to broader results and outcomes and she expressed hope that it will be replicated and scaled up to a broader landscape. She thanked PRF and ASEC for the successful conduct of the Inception Workshop and First RSC meeting and wished everyone a safe journey back home.
- 8.11 The First RSC meeting of the IRBM Project was adjourned at 12:30 pm GMT+8.

Appendix A. List of Participants

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Appendix B. Regional Steering Committee Meeting

GEF/UNDP/ASEAN PROJECT ON REDUCING POLLUTION AND PRESERVING ENVIRONMENTAL FLOWS IN THE EAST ASIAN SEAS THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED RIVER BASIN MANAGEMENT (IRBM) IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

Manila, Philippines
17 February 2023

PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

09:00 – 09:20	Opening of the Meeting
	Welcoming Remarks
	Dr. Inthavy Akkharath Chair, ASEAN Working Group on Water Resources Management
	Remarks
	Dr. Keita Furukawa Technical Session Chair, East Asian Seas Executive Committee
09:20 – 09:25	1.0 Adoption of Meeting Agenda
09:25 – 09:45	2.0 Summary and Recommendations from the Project Inception Workshop
09:45 – 10:30	3.0 Review and Approval of the Project Governance and Management Arrangements
10:30 – 10:45	Coffee Break
10:45 – 11:30	4.0 Review and Approval of 2023 Project Work Plan and Budget and Procurement Plan

11:30 – 11:35	5.0	Other Business
11:35 – 11:45	6.0	Date and Venue of Next RSC Meeting
11:45 – 12:00	7.0	Meeting Recommendations/Next Steps
12:00 – 12:15	8.0	Closing of the Meeting
		Country statements
12:15		Lunch

