Proceedings of the Thirty Third East Asian Seas Executive Committee Meeting

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Hybrid, face-to-face and Zoom

Proceedings of the 33rd PEMSEA Executive Committee Meeting

Korea Institute for Ocean Science and Technology, Busan, Republic of Korea
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Introduction

I. The East Asian Seas (EAS) Executive Committee convened its 33rd Executive Committee Meeting on 28th April 2025 in Busan, Republic of Korea. The meeting was attended by EAS Partnership Council Chair Dr. Vann Monyneath; Council Co-Chair Attorney Jonas Leones; Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair Mr. Le Dai Thang; Technical Session Chair Dr. Keita Furukawa; and Technical Session Co-Chair Dr. Suk-Jae Kwon. PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) Secretariat, led by Executive Director (ED) Ms. Aimee T. Gonzales, along with Head of Planning and Partnership Development Ms. Shinji Kim, Secretariat Coordinator Ms. Abigail Cruzada, and Secretariat Assistant Ms. Jeanne Francesca Cortez, served as Secretariat to the meeting. Dr. Handoko Adi Susanto, interim Executive Director of the Arafura Timor Seas (ATS) program ; Dr. Yeajin Jung from the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI); Deputy Director General Wang Antao; Ministry of Natural Resources of China; and Ms. Zhu Xiaotong, China PEMSEA Center joined the meetings as observers. Online observers included staff of the PEMSEA Resource Facility.

II. Supporting documents may be found in the Annexes:
   A. Annex 1 - Provisional Programme
   B. Annex 2 - Presentation, meeting documents, and photos
   C. Annex 3 - List of participants

1. Opening of the 33rd Executive Committee Meeting and Approval of the Agenda (EC/33/DOC/01)

1.1. PRF ED Ms. Aimee Gonzales opened the 33rd Executive Committee Meeting by acknowledging all participants attending both onsite and online. She then turned the floor to Dr. Vann Monyneath, Chair of the EAS Partnership Council, for the opening remarks.

1.2. Dr. Vann Monyneath began by acknowledging and welcoming the PEMSEA Executive Committee members and all participants. He expressed his sincere gratitude to KIOST for hosting the meeting and commended them for their excellent arrangements and warm hospitality. He also recognized PRF led by its Executive Director, for serving as the Secretariat for the meeting and extended his appreciation to the Secretariat team for their thorough preparations.

1.3. Dr. Monyneath noted that the meeting's agenda covered several important areas that will shape PEMSEA's strategic directions in the coming months and years—including the outcomes of the East Asian Seas Congress 2024, developments in the Blue Carbon

Program, and the ongoing review of SDS-SEA implementation. He emphasized that each of these items requires careful consideration and strategic inputs.

1.4. Reflecting on the outcomes of previous meetings, he highlighted the productive discussions on the SDS-SEA's priority programs and activities, and encouraged the Committee to build on that momentum by providing further strategic guidance for the Secretariat's work.

1.5. He concluded by encouraging active participation, stressing that the insights and recommendations of all members are essential to guiding PEMSEA's future work and formally opened the 33rd Meeting of the PEMSEA Executive Committee.

1.6. He then invited the Secretariat to facilitate a quick group photo session and to present the provisional program for the meeting.

1.7. Ms. Abi Cruzada, PRF Secretariat Coordinator, presented the agenda for the Executive Committee Meeting for the Executive Committee members' comments and subsequent adoption.

1.8. **Decision:** The agenda was adopted.

2. East Asian Seas Congress 2024: Summary Report and Ways Forward (EC/33/DOC/02)

2.1. Ms. Cruzada provided a summary of the outcomes and achievements of the East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2024 and the proposed ways forward to implement the ten synergistic actions outlined in the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration as well as the recommendations of the International Conference.

2.2. The EAS Congress 2024 was successfully held in Xiamen, China on 6-8 November, with the following outcomes:

- Validated and/or novel best practice models and locally optimized solutions for sustaining the ocean while enabling prosperity, with such innovations amplified through regional knowledge sharing;
- Renewed momentum and mobilization of partnerships and resources to fulfill the collectively endorsed SDS-SEA vision, with progress gaps overcome through concerted near-term actions that countries agree to through the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration and other Congress commitments; and
- Expanded connections between innovators across borders to accelerate the development and application of technologies and approaches that drive "triple wins" - environmental, social, and economic gains.

2.3. PEMSEA's strong position as a regional mechanism was reaffirmed at the Congress as exemplified in the renewed mobilization of partnerships and resources to advance the vision of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). She emphasized that countries reached important agreements, notably through the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration and other Congress commitments aligned with international commitments. PEMSEA has also expanded cross-border connections among innovators and stakeholders to accelerate the development and application of new technologies and approaches.

2.4. A total of 855 participants from 27 countries took part in the triennial event. This included representatives from 88 intergovernmental, international, and non-governmental organizations; 47 academic institutions; and 42 participants from local host institutions in China. Fifteen national governments and 22 local governments from the region were also represented.

2.5. The Congress reflected strong gender balance, with a male-to-female participation ratio of 60:40. Over the course of the international conference, 26 technical sessions were conducted, organized by 44 session conveners. The event was supported by 9 sponsors, most of whom were non-country partners and international organizations. Additionally, 40 exhibitors—primarily from local Chinese organizations, along with some international participants—showcased their work. In total, 169 global and regional experts shared their knowledge during the Congress.

2.6. The Congress' theme and objectives aligned with various global commitments and regional frameworks, reinforcing PEMSEA's role in advancing ocean sustainability and regional cooperation. These include, but are not limited to:

- UN SDGs: Focused on SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).
- Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework : Reaffirmed commitments to ambitious biodiversity targets, particularly for marine and coastal ecosystems.
- UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development: Promoted innovation, partnerships, and knowledge-sharing to support sustainable ocean governance.
- UNFCCC Paris Agreement: Accelerated climate action through nature-based solutions and the protection and restoration of ocean and coastal carbon sinks.
- BBNJ Agreement/High Seas Treaty: Supported the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction: Strengthened actions to reduce disaster risks and build coastal resilience.
- Bangkok Declaration on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Region: Advanced efforts to address marine litter and promote regional collaboration.

2.7. A major highlight of the Congress was the adoption of the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration, which was signed by nine country partners and endorsed by others. The Declaration provides a roadmap for advancing regional collaboration through ten synergistic actions that were identified across the four critical pillars of effective governance, healthy and resilient oceans, sustainable and inclusive blue economy, and healthy people; the actions include strengthening ICM, fostering inclusive and institutional collaboration, strengthening data-driven decision-making, scaling up nature-based solutions and blue carbon initiatives, among others, mobilizing blue financing, and exploring blue food systems and sustainable fisheries.

2.8. Other key milestones and programmatic developments from the congress, such as:

- ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) Partnership: A strategic partnership was forged with ACB to implement the NMAPS project, which focuses on strengthening marine protected area (MPA) capacity building across the region.
- Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol Development: Extensive discussions were held on enhancing collaboration to develop an original blue carbon accounting protocol.
- Launch of the State of the River Basin Reporting Guidebook: This landmark publication introduces a comprehensive monitoring and reporting mechanism to support the integrated management of water resources across seven major river basins in the East Asian Seas region.
- Expansion of PEMSEA's networks: Welcoming new learning centers and local governments from China, Laos, and the Philippines, thereby strengthening the reach and impact of regional-national-local collaborations.
- Signing of Letter of Cooperation between PNLC and PNLG: strengthening regional cooperation for coastal resource management through shared knowledge and enhanced capacity development initiatives.
- A MoA between Timor-Leste and PEMSEA: formalizing the implementation of the ROK-funded marine plastics project, which aims to implement innovative solutions at the local level to address one of the region's most pressing environmental challenges.

2.9. Major conclusions and recommendations from the international Congress mentioned that:

- The EAS Congress is recognized as an excellent platform to share experiences and good practices, transfer knowledge, as well as bring together various stakeholders in the region.

- The PNLG and PNLC are unique mechanisms which facilitate the linkage between science and local management practices. These linkages between the networks should be optimized to promote information and knowledge exchange amongst scientists, local policymakers and communities.

- There is a need to strengthen PEMSEA's existing mechanisms to engage scientists, decision makers and implementers, including the comprehensive documentation of good practices for wider audiences, beyond the region.

- Effective coastal and marine management should integrate scientific expertise, indigenous knowledge, and promote stakeholder engagement and collaborative partnerships to address complex ecological challenges.

- There is a need to elevate the EAS Profile Globally: Various regional mechanisms and initiatives need to come together in key international events (i.e., UN Ocean Conference 2025) to showcase the collaborative efforts in the region and boost the visibility of the East Asian Seas at a global level, demonstrating Oneness.

- Recognizing that various regional initiatives operate within the same government agencies and engage with similar focal points can result in inefficiencies, establishing a network of National Partners in the future could streamline coordination efforts across countries and enhance collaboration on joint actions

- The rise of digital twins, AI-driven monitoring, and underwater sensing technologies is revolutionizing ocean observation, enabling real-time marine ecosystem management and data-driven solutions for sustainable ocean practices.

- Financial institutions and policymakers should prioritize developing diverse financing mechanisms - from blended financing to blue bonds - to accelerate sustainable ocean investments while strengthening marine conservation efforts and ocean governance frameworks.

2.10. The EAS Congress full report was published on the EAS Congress 2024 website and pemsea.org. Ms. Cruzada then invited the Executive Committee members to provide feedback on the conduct, results, and outcomes of the EAS Congress 2024, with a view to enhancing future Congresses. She also requested recommendations on the implementation of the 10 synergistic action points outlined in the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration—particularly collaborative activities that can be undertaken by Country and Non-Country Partners with the support of the PEMSEA Resource Facility.

2.11. Before the Executive Committee shared their recommendations, Mr. Wang Antao, shared his comments on the EAS Congress 2024. Mr. Wang Antao expressed his appreciation for the successful organization of the 2024 East Asian Seas Congress, crediting the strong support of the Xiamen Municipal Government and the cooperation with PEMSEA Resource Facility. He highlighted Congress as an event led to numerous outcomes that will shape regional cooperation moving forward.

2.12. He placed particular emphasis on the adoption of the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration, which includes 10 recommended action points. He referred to these as a collective accomplishment for the East Asian Seas region and encouraged all PEMSEA partners to actively support their implementation.

2.13. Mr. Wang underscored the importance of aligning the Xiamen Declaration with the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA), and called on all partners to work collaboratively to translate these commitments into concrete actions at the regional level.

2.14. He concluded by thanking the Committee and reaffirming China's commitment to supporting the realization of the Congress outcomes. Dr. Monyneath thanked Ms. Cruzada and Mr. Wang for their report and comments on the output or recommendations from the congress. He then opened the floor for any comments and recommendations.

2.15. Dr. Keita Furukawa, Technical Session Chair, expressed his appreciation for Ms. Cruzada's presentation and extended his thanks to China for hosting the EAS Congress.

2.16. While he had no objections to the report, he emphasized the importance of further reinforcing the perspectives shared by youth participants. He noted that the 'Youth Call to Action' was one of the Congress's key achievements, as it urged the Partnership to take immediate and meaningful action for a livable and sustainable future. Dr. Furukawa stressed that youth voices should be given more attention and consideration in PEMSEA's ongoing and future efforts. He stressed the need to look toward the next generation—not only in ocean stewardship but also in governance and implementation—highlighting the critical role youth play in shaping the future of coastal and ocean sustainability.

2.17. He also emphasized that they are now entering a new phase—moving beyond collaboration toward co-production in coastal and ocean management. He underscored that innovation should be driven through co-productive processes, which require enhanced stakeholder engagement. He noted that the EAS Congress serves as a key milestone in shifting toward a more inclusive and co-productive approach to management across the East Asian Seas region.

2.18. Dr. Monyneath expressed appreciation for the inputs shared and confirmed that the Secretariat would take note of all comments raised. He supported the acceptance of the Report and the approval of the proposed recommendations. With no further comments or objections from the Committee, he acknowledged that the points raised had been approved by the Executive Committee members and thanked everyone for their cooperation.

2.19. **Conclusion:** The EC concurred with the conclusions and recommendations presented in the EAS Congress Report.

2.20. **Recommendations:**

- Highlight the implementation of the youth call to action, recognizing the importance of youth engagement in scaling ocean action.

- Build on the momentum of the Congress to ensure a more inclusive and coproductive management of ocean and coastal governance in the region.

2.21. **Decision**: The Conclusions and Recommendations of the EAS Congress 2024 report were noted and approved.

3. SDS-SEA Alignment to 2030 (EC/33/DOC/03)

3.1. Ms. Aimee Gonzales presented the plans and progress related to the refinement of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) Implementation Plan (IP) 2023-2027 and the proposed extension of its targets to 2030.

3.2. Ms. Gonzales began by acknowledging the importance of aligning the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA) with global targets, particularly the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030. She emphasized the need to update the timeframe and strategic focus of SDS-SEA to reflect recent developments, such as the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration and growing calls for enhanced collaboration, innovation, and inclusive approaches.

3.3. Joined by Ms. Kate Aguiling, SDS-SEA consultant, who participated online, Ms. Gonzales provided an overview of the ongoing review process of SDS-SEA. She explained that since its adoption over 30 years ago, the SDS-SEA has remained a regionally owned and jointly endorsed strategy by both Country and Non-Country Partners, evolving to respond to emerging coastal and ocean challenges. The most recent major revision occurred in 2015, aligning the strategy with global priorities such as the UN SDGs. The long-term strategy is realized through five-year implementation plans, the current iteration running from 2023-2027. Recognizing the many international agreements and frameworks developed post-2020 to address the existing challenges in the ocean and coasts, this prompted the need for an extension to 2030 to align with the timelines of these commitments.

3.4. Ms. Gonzales highlighted that while new elements have been included in the current implementation plan, including stronger emphasis on gender equality and social inclusion, the application of tools from Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) to

Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM), and enhanced stakeholder engagement, there is a need to review the plan to know whether its targets are still relevant to the current progress rate of implementation amongst EAS countries, particularly with emerging issues and trends cropping up at a more frequent pace.

3.5. The extension of the SDS-SEA IP to 2030 will include a review of the current progress of implementation from 2023-2025 (with certain targets monitored up to 2022, considering delays in implementation) as well as an initial assessment of emerging trends and issues in the region. It will also incorporate a recommendation to explore planning beyond 2030 and will be supported by a revised monitoring and evaluation framework using a balanced scorecard approach.

3.6. She noted that the consultant leading the review has suggested refining the original framework to better suit PEMSEA's context, recommending thematic focus areas such as ocean governance, innovation, partnerships, and sustainable finance. The expected outputs include an updated strategy map, scorecard, and implementation plan for 2023–2030, which will be presented for the Partnership Council's approval.

3.7. Alongside the strategic review, an organizational capacity assessment is being conducted. This will begin with the PRF Secretariat and be expanded to include an assessment and recommendations to improve governance functions of the EAS PC using a custom tool designed for PEMSEA's 'partnership' based institutional nature. The results will inform the development of an organizational strategy and capacity-building plan for 2025–2030, as well as a PEMSEA Business Plan. An update of plans on strategic programming, institutional strengthening and financial strengthening will be presented during the 17th EAS PC and finalized for approval at the expanded Executive Committee meeting in October 2025.

3.8. In closing, Ms. Gonzales invited the Executive Committee to review the proposed scope, deliverables, consultation process for the strategy review and institutional strengthening, and to offer suggestions on ensuring financial sustainability. Dr. Monyneath opened the floor for discussion and recommendations.

3.9. Ms. Kate Aguiling also joined the discussion following the presentation of Executive Director Aimee Gonzales by further elaborating on the ongoing initiative to refine the SDS-SEA and extend its targets through 2030 and beyond. She reiterated that the effort is centered on three key areas:

3.10. First, the review of PEMSEA's strategic programming, particularly the implementation plan for the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia (SDS-SEA). This includes assessing the current status of implementation and progress toward the agreed targets.

3.11. Second is the review of organizational capability and effectiveness. Ms. Aguiling noted that it is essential to assess PEMSEA's current institutional capacity to determine whether it is sufficiently equipped to meet more ambitious goals in the coming years.

3.12. Third, she highlighted financial sustainability as a core focus. Ensuring that there is a sustained mechanism to support both the implementation of SDS-SEA and the operational needs of the PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) will be critical.

3.13. Ms. Aguiling noted that all three components require a series of background assessments to evaluate PEMSEA's readiness for future challenges. She emphasized that the guiding question for this review is: "Is PEMSEA ready to address the new and evolving challenges of the next decade?"

3.14. In addition to aligning with the 10 synergistic actions of the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration and the outcomes of the EAS Congress, Ms. Aguiling acknowledged the growing complexity of the global ocean governance landscape. This includes persistent and emerging ecological, economic, environmental, social, and even geopolitical issues that affect the region. She affirmed that the current review process seeks to navigate these changes through a strengthened PEMSEA mechanism and approach.

3.15. Dr. Keita Furukawa expressed his general support for the direction of the strategy review and had no objection to the process. However, he emphasized the importance of allowing adequate time for inclusive discussions to co-create a shared future vision and ensure that the revised strategy aligns with this vision.

3.16. He reiterated a point raised earlier in the meeting—highlighting the critical role of youth engagement in the SDS-SEA refinement process. Dr. Furukawa underscored that the targets being developed are not solely for the present generation but for the future generations who will inherit the outcomes of these efforts. He encouraged the Secretariat and partners to find ways to integrate the voices of youth in the process, acknowledging that while this may be technically challenging, it is essential for building an inclusive strategy.

3.17. Dr. Furukawa suggested that if there is some interaction between youth leaders within the PEMSEA network—such as through the PEMSEA Network of Learning Centers (PNLC) or the Country and Non-Country Partners who maintain individual communication with their national or local youth sectors—these channels should be utilized. He encouraged partners to gather as many perspectives as possible from youth voices to inform the strategy's refinement.

3.18. He emphasized that such engagement would reflect PEMSEA's inclusive and forward-looking approach, and also suggested exploring ways to engage Indigenous communities and other underrepresented groups, underscoring the principle of leaving no one behind.

3.19. Ms. Aguiling expressed appreciation to Dr. Keita Furukawa for his earlier guidance, especially regarding the importance of gender equity, social inclusion, and youth and indigenous engagement. These inputs will be considered in refining the SDS-SEA implementation moving forward.

3.20. Ms. Aguiling noted that the work is both complex and resource-intensive, having already started in February to allow adequate time for consultation with PEMSEA partners and networks. In line with previous suggestions, consultations will include past EAS Congress awardees (Humans of the EAS) and youth leaders from the Youth Forum.

3.21. **Conclusion:** The EC noted with appreciation the proposal to review the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan 2023-2027 with the goal to extend it to 2030, in alignment with international agreements and the UN SDGs.

3.22. **Recommendations:**

- Consider engaging youth and other vulnerable sectors (i.e., indigenous peoples, sectoral groups), either through PEMSEA or through respective CPs/NCP involvement in identifying/validating targets of the extended SDS-SEA IP.

3.23. **Decision**:
The EC approved the scope, deliverables, and process of consultations of the SDS-SEA review and Organizational Development Review.

4. PRF Updates for 2024 and 2025 (EC/33/DOC/04)

4.1. Ms. Gonzales presented the updates on the PEMSEA Resource Facility's (PRF) accomplishments for 2024 and planned activities for 2025.

4.2. The year 2024 was a milestone year for PRF, with the extensive preparation and successful organization and hosting of the East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress 2024 in Xiamen, together with the Ministry of Natural Resources of China and the Xiamen Municipal People's Government. A key outcome of the Congress was the adoption of the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration, which reaffirmed the commitment of PEMSEA Country and Non-Country Partners to sustainable ocean governance and the blue economy.

4.3. She highlighted that the Congress welcomed new collaborators beyond traditional partners, and there was a significant deepening of the PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) and Learning Centers (PNLC) collaboration—bringing science and action together at the local level.

4.4. Another 2024 achievement was the expansion of regional initiatives. PEMSEA collaborated with the ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB), UNDP, GEF, and others on a transboundary project for managing networks of marine protected areas (MPAs), aligned with commitments under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. PEMSEA also provided technical advisory services to international bodies such as UNOPS and the World Bank through the Southeast Asia Marine Pollution Action Plan.

4.5. She noted continued progress in the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program, including the development of a draft regional protocol for blue carbon accounting, comparative studies on blue carbon supply and demand in the EAS Region, and the establishment of the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Technical Working Group (TWG) in January 2025. Other regional efforts included work on marine plastic pollution involving 10 cities in the Philippines and Timor-Leste under the Marine Plastics ODA Project, and the development of integrated river basin management (IRBM) frameworks and tools led by the GEF/UNDP/ASEAN/PEMSEA IRBM project.

4.6. On the financial front, Ms. Gonzales reported a strong year in 2024, with PEMSEA meeting its USD 3.5 million funding target, and a projected USD 4.86 million for 2025. Funding sources included:

- Modest but growing contributions from 9 out of 11 Country Partners;
- Multi-year projects funded by multilateral and bilateral development agencies;
- Technical advisory services, which offer flexibility and lessen dependence on donor projects;
- Revenues from the EAS Congress, including sponsorships and registration fees;
- In-kind and financial support from China as the 2024 Congress host.

4.7. She expressed appreciation to PRF staff and partners, particularly those supporting the implementation of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan (SDS-SEA), noting that all planned activities for 2024 were delivered without cancellation. Vietnam and Indonesia were cited for their new contributions. Additionally, six countries are progressing on ocean policy development, and five have successfully mainstreamed ICM into national plans.

4.8. In terms of capacity development, 2024 saw increased activity through the PNLC, with an expanded number of training programs and study tours. Knowledge exchange was also enhanced through the PEMSEA SEA Knowledge Bank (SEAKB) platform and increased social media engagement. However, she noted that only three countries submitted reports on gender mainstreaming, suggesting underreporting rather than lack of action.

4.9. Under the "Healthy Ocean", Ms. Gonzales reported active implementation of PNLG strategic action programs. Six countries updated their biodiversity strategies, with progress in ecosystem restoration and MPAs. A blue carbon roadmap was completed, and national consultations on climate adaptation were held.

4.10. In the “Healthy People”, stakeholder engagement plans were developed, with improved outreach and documented examples of sustainable livelihoods and biodiversity-friendly enterprises, particularly in the Philippines, China, and Singapore. However, she reiterated that broader reporting from other countries remains essential.

4.11. Regarding "Blue Economy", she noted the concept being mainstreamed in national policies, increased private sector engagement in coastal and marine issues in the region, and adoption of nature-based solutions. Several blue economy and finance-related forums were also organized, but these efforts need scaling up.

4.12. Strategic partnerships were further strengthened, including those with youth groups. She highlighted the Youth Forum held in Korea, which engaged 19 youth leaders from 10 countries and produced a regional "Youth Call to Action."

4.13. Looking ahead to 2025, Ms. Gonzales described it as a “pivotal shift” year for PEMSEA, driven by the need to:

- Implement the commitments from the Xiamen Ministerial Declaration;
- Consolidate country contributions to regional and global targets;
- Respond to shifting political, policy, and economic landscapes.

4.14. She underscored the importance of preparing for potential challenges related to global trade tensions and their possible effects on environmental funding. Key 2025 governance milestones include:

- The election of a new PEMSEA Executive Committee;
- Leadership changes within the PNLG, with a new President and Vice-Chair to be selected by September 2025;
- The identification of the next host country for the East Asian Seas Congress 2027;
- Initiating the recruitment process for a new Executive Director of the PRF, in anticipation of Ms. Gonzales’ term concluding in 2026–2027.

4.15. Ms. Gonzales reflected on the recent East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress hosted in Xiamen, acknowledging the significant effort and time required to organize such a large-scale event. She shared that she had not yet fully recovered from the demands of the recent Congress and noted the challenge of immediately beginning preparations for the next one.

4.16. In light of this, Ms. Gonzales proposed that the Executive Committee (EC) or the Partnership Council (PC) consider extending the interval between EAS Congresses to five years, instead of the current three-year cycle. She expressed that a five-year interval might be more realistic and manageable, given the extensive planning, resource mobilization, and coordination involved in successfully staging the Congress. She also stressed the need to start recruitment efforts for the executive director position

early due to the typically lengthy process, to onboard the new Director by 2027 or early 2028.

4.17. Ms. Gonzales also mentioned that a management consultant, together with Ms. Kate Aguiling, is currently supporting a review to ensure that PEMSEA's strategic programming remains 'fit for purpose' post-2025. In terms of knowledge products and capacity development tools, she announced:

- A forthcoming blue carbon accounting framework;
- A new integrated training manual combining ICM, marine spatial planning (MSP), and other area-based management tools—marking the first time these tools are brought together in one manual. She emphasized that, while ICM and MSP are often treated separately, they share common principles such as stakeholder engagement, strong governance and leaders, and inclusivity, and are increasingly overlapping in practice.

4.18. She noted that this unified approach is being piloted under the ENMAPS project and IRBM initiatives, advocating for source-to-sea thinking. Lastly, Ms. Gonzales acknowledged that the PRF now has more flexibility in mobilizing resources and intends to strengthen its global presence. Key upcoming engagements include:

- Participation in the Our Ocean Conference in Busan, RO Korea (April) and the 3rd UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France (June);
- A mayors' compact on marine plastic pollution;
- The launch of solutions templates for governance and investment on integrated river basin management.

4.19. She concluded by reaffirming PEMSEA's mission to remain a credible regional mechanism promoting integrated management solutions through strategic partnerships. While the goals remain the same, she said, "our collective actions need to be accelerated." In response, the Chair thanked Ms. Gonzales for her leadership and updates.

4.20. **Discussion Highlights:**

Dr. Monyneath offered brief remarks on the importance of further defining the relationship between ICM and MSP, particularly in light of global targets such as the 30x30 biodiversity commitment. He suggested further categorization and clarity to help countries, whether coastal or oceanic, align more effectively in achieving their targets.

4.21. Undersecretary Leones also acknowledged the accomplishments of the PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) and suggested that the Secretariat consider capturing and reflecting the status of ongoing activities and initiatives at the national level, particularly from participation in other regional bodies.

4.22. He cited the example of the Philippines, where several bills related to the blue economy, blue carbon, and the blue belt are currently pending in Congress. He

emphasized that data and information collected through PEMSEA's networks and mechanisms could be useful in informing and supporting the development and passage of such national policies.

4.23. He further noted that the Philippines has established marine stations to monitor and assess ocean and coastal conditions, and suggested that PEMSEA could explore opportunities to support countries in strengthening their coastal resource management and policy frameworks.

4.24. He added that the Philippines is engaged in significant coordination efforts and hosts a wide pool of experts in ocean and coastal governance. He expressed willingness to share this expertise with other PEMSEA members, noting that such collaboration could provide valuable input to the policy development processes in the region.

4.25. Dr. Monyneath thanked USec. Leones for providing a national perspective on the matter. He noted the importance of reflecting national-level efforts in regional discussions, emphasizing that such insights can help inform and strengthen PEMSEA's collective strategies.

4.26. He shared that Cambodia has adopted a system from China to advance marine spatial planning, particularly to designate and manage marine conservation areas more effectively. While the approach is still in its early stages, he expressed gratitude to the Government of China for its support in this area.

4.27. Dr. Monyneath agreed that advancing from national to regional coordination and action represents a constructive path forward. He suggested that this kind of alignment could also benefit future collaboration with other countries such as Malaysia and Australia, particularly in marine conservation and ocean governance initiatives.

4.28. Dr. Furukawa also expressed appreciation for the update. He offered a response to the earlier suggestion made by Ms. Aimee Gonzales to consider organizing the East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress every five years. He acknowledged the rationale behind the proposed shift, especially considering that national and regional decision-making processes require time. However, drawing from his perspective in the scientific field, he noted that scientific knowledge and the global climate situation are evolving rapidly—too rapidly, in his view, for a five-year interval to suffice.

4.29. He emphasized the value of the EAS Congress in bringing together both policymakers and scientists, particularly through the parallel organization of the policy-focused Ministerial Forum and the science-focused International Conference. If holding the full Congress on a triennial basis proves difficult, he suggested that an alternative model could be explored. For example, a biennial scientific conference could be maintained to ensure regular updates and knowledge exchange among the scientific community, while the Ministerial-level gathering could occur every four years.

4.30. Dr. Furukawa underscored the importance of more frequent scientific engagement, particularly given the urgency of the environmental crises facing the region and the world. He concluded by encouraging continued discussion on structuring Congress activities in a way that balances the needs for both timely scientific updates and strategic policymaking. Dr. Monyneath thanked everyone who participated and requested the secretariat to take note of and implement the necessary actions on this comment or suggestion.

4.31. **Conclusion**:The EC commended the updates provided by PRF on their 2024 achievements and commended the planned activities for 2025, noting in particular the activities on SDS-SEA Implementation monitoring, the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program and preparatory plans for EAS Congress 2027.

4.32. **Recommendations**:

- On SDS-SEA Implementation, the EC suggested to consider utilizing PEMSEA's studies/technical efforts/expertise and collaborate on sharing expertise amongst Country Partners to strengthen ocean/coastal national policies of PEMSEA partners
- On reviewing the triennial conduct of EAS Congress, while the proposal to conduct it every 5 years may be difficult considering the pace of new findings and global situations, it is suggested that the scientific sessions of the congress could be conducted more frequently (e.g. biannually) and the ministerial can be conducted dialogue every 4 years

5. 17th EAS Partnership Council Dates and Agenda (EC/33/DOC/05)

5.1. Ms. Cruzada presented the provisional agenda and proposed dates of the 17th EAS Partnership Council Meeting.

5.2. The meeting is proposed to be held on 22–24 July 2025 in the Philippines. Coordination is ongoing with the Philippine National Focal Point, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is underway to finalize the venue, which will most likely be in Manila. Expected participants include Country and Non-Country Partners, observers from the PEMSI Network of Learning Centers, the Secretariat, and representatives from the host country.

5.3. Key activities of the meeting include:

- Election of EAS Partnership Council Officers for the term July 2025–July 2028;
- A review and validation workshop of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan (SDS-SEA IP) Extension to 2030;

- Validation of the progress review of the SDS-SEA IP implementation, with input and confirmation of data and recommendations from country and non-country partners;
- Approval of the Regional Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol, which is expected to be finalized by then;
- Approval of the Terms of Reference for the recruitment of the new PRF Executive Director for the term 2027–2029.
- Ms. Cruzada explained that the agenda of the 17th Partnership Council Meeting is based on matters arising from previous EC and PC meetings. This includes:
- The extension of the SDS-SEA IP, which stems from ongoing discussions on aligning the PEMSEA Mechanism with robust and resilient goals to 2030;
- Progress of the Blue Carbon Program, including the establishment of a Blue Carbon Technical Working Group in January 2025, with pending activities such as the TWG workshop and completion of the regional accounting protocol;
- Finalization of the blue carbon roadmap targets;
- Selection and appointment of the new PRF Executive Director, which is lined up for discussion in the current meeting;
- PEMEAI's international advocacies, with several planned side events and regional efforts for 2025, despite ongoing budget limitations that challenge broader engagement in global events.

5.4. Ms. Cruzada then outlined the proposed agenda for the July 2025 Partnership Council:

- 22 July: Council session and the first part of the technical session, including the election of the new EAS PC officers, Chair's regular report, and presentation of progress updates by Country and Non-Country Partners. The results of the SDS-SEA IP review (covering 2020 to early 2025) will also be presented for validation, with requests for supplementary data, if needed..
- Evening of 22 July: A Partnership Night will be held.
- 23 July: Continuation of the technical session to discuss updates on the blue carbon program, including a detailed discussion on the regional accounting protocol and revised roadmap. The intergovernmental session will follow in the afternoon, covering updates on the PEMSI Sustainability Plan and the 2025–2026 PRF work plan and budget.
- 24 July: A tentative field trip for all participants.

5.5. She requested the Executive Committee members to provide comments or suggestions and, in the absence of further feedback, to consider the approval of the proposed agenda. Dr. Monyneath once again opened the floor for discussion.

5.6. **Discussion Highlights:**

Dr. Furukawa emphasized that the annual meeting of the Partnership Council provides a valuable opportunity for Non-Country Partners (NCPs) to share their activities and accomplishments. He noted that many NCPs are engaged in highly specific scientific

and policy-related work, and this meeting serves as a key moment to gather insights and information from their efforts.

5.7. While acknowledging that the major focus of the upcoming technical session is the refinement of the SDS-SEA Implementation Plan, Dr. Furukawa suggested that time could also be allocated to gather individual feedback from NCPs on how their work aligns with the plan's direction, their views on the current revision, and their future contributions.

5.8. He proposed having closer coordination with the PEMSEA Resource Facility (PRF) ahead of the meeting to ensure meaningful inputs from both Non-Country and Country Partners during the technical session. Dr. Furukawa emphasized that beyond presenting a revised document, the session should be utilized for building mutual understanding and dialogue among partners. He concluded by expressing his interest in further discussing how to maximize the use of this time, in alignment with the broader agenda of the Council Meeting.

5.9. Undersecretary Leones suggested that, in addition to engaging Country Partners, PEMSEA could consider inviting other regional and international partnerships that are undertaking similar initiatives. He recalled a conversation with ED during lunch break, where they noted that several platforms—such as COBSEA (Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia), the Coral Triangle Initiative, and other organizations—are engaged in comparable work.

5.10. He proposed that extending invitations to these organizations to attend the Partnership Council meeting would provide an opportunity to share updates, learn from their ongoing efforts, and explore potential areas for collaboration. Since these entities share PEMSEA's objectives of protecting and conserving marine and coastal resources, Undersecretary Leones emphasized that such exchanges could offer valuable lessons and insights to inform PEMSEA's policymaking and strengthen its guidance to partners.

5.11. He submitted the suggestion to the Executive Committee for consideration. Ms. Kate Aguiling also raised points during the discussion. Ms. Aguiling provided clarification on the inclusion of the validation workshop for the SDS Implementation Plan during the upcoming Partnership Council meeting. She explained that the initial review of the document has already been completed. This review encompassed a wide range of resources, including national reports, PEMSEA documents, and outputs from various projects managed by PEMSEA, supplemented by additional desktop research.

5.12. She noted that the draft review document will be released before the Partnership Council meeting to allow ample time for review by PEMSEA partners, networks, and collaborators. The goal is to complete the validation exercise between May and early June so that any corrections or updated information can be incorporated before finalization.

5.13. Ms. Aguiling agreed with Dr. Furukawa's earlier point that the technical session should go beyond validating past accomplishments. She emphasized that it should also focus on identifying emerging priorities and targets that will shape the SDS Implementation Plan for 2026–2030. She highlighted the importance of input from not only country partners but also non-country partners and any additional observers from regional organizations whose plans align with SDS objectives.

5.14. She concluded by noting that she will be working closely with the PEMSEA Resource Facility Secretariat to design the workshop in a way that captures diverse inputs and strengthens PEMSEA's contribution to addressing evolving ocean and coastal challenges in the region.

5.15. Ms. Gonzales agreed with the suggestion to extend invitations to other regional organizations and international partnerships working on similar ocean and coastal management issues. In this context, she also invited Executive Committee members to attend the upcoming PEMSEA-led session at the Our Ocean Conference, which she will be co-moderating alongside representatives from COBSEA. Dr. Monyneath thanked everyone who participated and requested the secretariat to take note of and implement the necessary actions on this comment or suggestion.

5.16. **Conclusion:** The EC posed no objections to the proposed agenda of the 17th EAS PC Meeting.

5.17. **Recommendation:** Refine the Technical Session agenda, particularly the SDS-SEA IP workshop to ensure sharing of initiatives of NCPs and CPs when identifying the PEMSEA's priorities in the extended SDS-SEA IP.

5.18. **Decision:** The EC approved the provisional agenda of the 17th EAS PC Meeting, subject to further revisions based on recommendations.

6. Non-Country Partner Review (EC/33/DOC/06)

6.1. Ms. Cruzada presented the results of the Non-Country Partner Review conducted for the period of March 2023 - March 2025. Ms. Cruzada started by recalling that the status of NCP engagement was last presented during the 30th Executive Committee (EC) Meeting in 2023. The current document includes updated information on recent engagements, reflecting significant changes since the previous report.

6.2. She noted that there are currently 22 NCPs, initially categorized as either founding partners—those that signed the Haikou Partnership Agreement in 2006—or new partners, which refers to organizations that formalized their cooperation with PEMSEA

after 2006. The current list of NCPs has now been categorized based on the level of engagement: active, partially engaged, needing engagement, or inactive.

6.3. Ms. Cruzada explained that active NCPs are those with valid and active Letters of Agreement (LOAs) or other formal agreements with PRF extending through 2025, those serving as implementing partners of PEMSEA-led projects, or those that have co-organized collaborative workshops or trainings with PEMSEA between 2023 and 2024. These partners may also have consistently participated in annual Partnership Council meetings or expanded EC meetings during that period.

6.4. Partially engaged NCPs may also have valid agreements in place, but with unspecified or limited areas of collaboration. These organizations may have participated in at least one PEMSEA-organized workshop, training, or governance meeting, but are not currently serving as implementing partners of PEMSEA projects.

6.5. NCPs identified as needing engagement include those that may have experienced changes in institutional structure, focal persons, or leadership. While they may have participated in at least one EC meeting, they have had limited or no further involvement with PEMSEA activities.

6.6. She concluded by presenting the updated status of engagement as of March 2025 and outlined proposed strategies for strengthening collaboration with those NCPs that are currently inactive or require re-engagement. She then called Ms. Francesca Cortez, Secretariat Assistant, to explain the specific status of all NCPs.

6.7. Ms. Cortez thanked Ms Cruzada and proceeded to share the status of the NCPs. She explained that several NCPs remain actively engaged in collaboration with PEMSEA. The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) continues its cooperative work through the ASEAN ENMAPS Project (2024–2028), under a valid Letter of Cooperation (LOC) extending until 2029. Conservation International (CI) Philippines is also active, with discussions ongoing for a new MOA or LOC in support of the PRICELESS Project and continued participation in the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group. The Korea Environment Institute (KEI), Korea Institute of Ocean Science and Technology (KIOST), and Korea Maritime Institute (KMI) maintain strong engagement, particularly in support of capacity-building activities and blue carbon initiatives. The Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation (KOEM) and the Ocean Policy Research Institute – Sasakawa Peace Foundation (OPRI-SPF) are similarly active, with OPRI-SPF contributing directly to the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group. Oil Spill Response Limited (OSRL) also remains involved, and proposals are being considered to revisit collaborative work related to plastic and pollution-focused events. The PEMSEA Network of Local Governments (PNLG) sustains its engagement through the annual PNLG Forum, with new discussions underway on utilizing PNLG Funds for targeted capacity-building activities. Additionally, the National Marine Hazard Mitigation

Service (NMHMS) of China has been actively participating in blue carbon initiatives and is exploring further opportunities for training and regional learning exchanges.

6.8. Partially engaged partners include the International Environmental Management of Enclosed Coastal Seas (EMECS) Center, International Ocean Institute (IOI), Marine Biodiversity Institute of Korea (MABIK), Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), and Plymouth Marine Laboratory (PML). These partners have participated in meetings or supported initiatives but currently lack formal agreements or defined scopes of collaboration. Notably, PML has proposed a joint initiative titled “AI for Ocean Health,” signaling ongoing interest, while MABIK is currently without a designated focal point. These cases require follow-up to assess the potential for renewed or expanded engagement.

6.9. Several NCPs have been identified as needing engagement discussions. These include the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission – Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (IOC-WESTPAC), which previously participated in PC sessions but whose LOC has since lapsed; Ipieca, which is currently exploring options for collaboration on capacity-building; and the Norwegian Institute for Water Research (NIVA), which could support marine plastic pollution activities. The Secretariat will continue efforts to initiate or revive dialogues with these institutions, aiming to clarify mutual priorities and formalize partnerships.

6.10. Ms. Cortez explained that some organizations are considered inactive at this time, including the Coastal Management Center (CMC) and the UNDP/GEF Small Grants Programme (SGP), both of which lack current focal points or active engagement. She shared that these partners may be recognized as “Legacy Partners” in acknowledgment of their historical contributions. Similarly, the UNEP Global Programme of Action (UNEP/GPA) is no longer actively involved, though the Secretariat has recommended outreach to UNEP to determine interest in re-engagement.

6.11. In closing, Ms. Cortez affirmed that the PEMSEA Resource Facility will continue its efforts to reconnect with partially engaged and inactive NCPs. She then turned the floor back to Ms. Cruzada to share the conclusion.

6.12. Ms. Cruzada concluded the discussion by summarizing the key points raised during the NCP engagement review. She noted that a more detailed account of each Non-Country Partner’s (NCP’s) history with PEMSEA—including the year they joined and the extent of their participation over time—is available in the document circulated for this agenda item.

6.13. Ms. Cruzada emphasized that one of the main challenges in sustaining engagement with NCPs is the frequent leadership transitions within partner organizations. Such changes often require PEMSEA to reintroduce its work, objectives, and partnership mechanisms to new leaders. Another recurring issue is the absence of active focal

points, particularly among partners that joined as early as 2006 but have had no recent interaction with PEMSEA. In many cases, the Secretariat has lost contact with these organizations, although they are still formally recognized as NCPs.

6.14. She also highlighted that internal restructuring within some organizations has led to the dissolution or reassignment of focal departments previously responsible for coordinating with PEMSEA. In such instances, renewed discussions are needed to determine how collaboration can be re-established. Furthermore, staff turnover often disrupts continuity, with some outgoing focal points failing to formally transfer their PEMSEA-related responsibilities to successors. In response, the Secretariat has adapted by reaching out to other individuals within the same institutions where previous lines of communication remain open.

6.15. Ms. Cruzada noted that while many NCPs are still considered formally active—often through valid Letters of Cooperation or other agreements—their level of participation is often limited to attending governance meetings, especially during EAS Congress years. To address this, PEMSEA is undertaking several measures to revitalize these relationships. These include arranging bilateral meetings where feasible, conducting face-to-face engagements at regional events to reintroduce PEMSEA, and inviting NCPs to serve as resource persons in PEMSEA-led projects and capacity-building activities, particularly those targeting the PNLG and PNLC networks. Opportunities for consultancy engagements and revenue-generating partnerships are also being explored, such as involving NCPs in the new Blue Carbon Program currently under development.

6.16. Efforts are ongoing to update and renew cooperation agreements with active partners. Ms. Cruzada extended her appreciation to Mr. Shinji, Head of Partnerships and Planning, for his contributions in revitalizing partnerships with Korean NCPs, and to Dr. Kwon for his support in facilitating short-term projects and capacity-building activities with their assistance. She reiterated the value of continuing hybrid formats for EC and PC meetings post-pandemic, which allow broader participation among NCPs regardless of location.

6.17. In terms of moving forward, Ms. Cruzada raised the PRF's proposed rebranding of currently inactive NCPs as "Legacy Partners" in recognition of their past contributions to PEMSEA over the last three decades. This would allow PEMSEA to maintain the relationship while acknowledging organizational changes that may limit ongoing engagement. She concluded by requesting the EC's feedback and consideration of the proposed rebranding, as well as suggestions on how to strengthen collaboration with existing NCPs and identify potential new ones to support the implementation of the forthcoming SDS-SEA Implementation Plan.

6.18. Dr. Monyneath thanked Ms. Cruzada and opened the floor for discussion.

6.19. **Discussion Highlights:**
Dr. Furukawa inquired about the nature of communication with NCPs during the review process. He asked whether the Secretariat had engaged directly with NCPs and, if so, whether any expectations or feedback had been conveyed from their side. He emphasized the importance of recognizing that while discussions often focus on how NCPs contribute to PEMSEA, partnerships should be reciprocal. Dr. Furukawa highlighted the need to understand what value or benefits NCPs expect to gain from their engagement with PEMSEA, suggesting that a sustainable and effective partnership framework must consider the perspectives and motivations of both parties.

6.20. Ms. Aimee Gonzales responded by affirming that engagement with NCPs is not a one-way process. She explained that during bilateral exchanges, PEMSEA seeks to understand where each partner currently stands in terms of progress and areas of focus, while also sharing updates on PEMSEA's own initiatives. She cited the example of discussions with NIVA, where the organization expressed its focus on the blue economy in ASEAN. PEMSEA responded by offering support or collaboration, to which NIVA replied that their project was still in the early stages and that they would follow up when ready.

6.21. Ms. Gonzales also noted ongoing exploratory discussions with Ipieca, where a new focal person has taken over, underscoring the evolving nature of some partnerships. She emphasized that these conversations are consistently framed as a two-way dialogue, centered on what PEMSEA and the partner can do together, rather than unidirectional support.

6.22. In cases such as the Coastal Management Center (CMC), Ms. Gonzales shared that although the organization still exists on paper, it is no longer operational, with founding members like Dr. Chua and Dr. Gil Jacinto having retired. She suggested the idea of categorizing such partners as "legacy partners." This could be indicated internally or on the website, potentially with inclusive dates showing when the organization was active. She noted that some NCPs themselves have informed PEMSEA that they are no longer active, reinforcing the need for a more accurate and respectful representation of partnership status. She concluded by reflecting that while PEMSEA often references 22 NCPs, not all are actively engaged at the same time.

6.23. Undersecretary Leones expressed reservations about categorizing inactive partners as "legacy partners." He raised concerns that if these organizations were labeled as such, it would necessitate defining and explaining why they were given this designation, potentially affecting their interest in further collaboration. Instead, he suggested maintaining the distinction between "active" and "inactive" partners for the time being.

6.24. He cited the example of the Small Grants Program (SGP), which had initially been a regional project under UNDP but was decentralized about five years ago. Each country now manages its own SGP. Undersecretary Leones, having chaired the steering

committee for the project, pointed out that while communication with the New York office no longer directly involves PEMSEA, the local SGP offices could still provide an opportunity for renewed collaboration. He proposed that rather than labeling the SGP as inactive or legacy, efforts should be made to explore other avenues to strengthen collaboration with NCPs. He cautioned that labeling organizations as legacy partners might unintentionally diminish their interest and participation in PEMSEA activities.

6.25. **Conclusion**: The EC noted with appreciation the updated Non-Country Partner review, highlighting the need to understand what value or benefits NCPs expect to gain from their engagement with PEMSEA, suggesting that a sustainable and effective partnership framework must consider the perspectives and motivations of both parties and made recommendations on the proposed ways forward to address inactive NCPs.

6.26. **Recommendations**:

- Consider discussions on the NCP expectations and collaboration with PEMSEA.
- Reconsider the category of using “legacy partners” for inactive NCPs as it may affect future engagement should the former. Instead, it was recommended to explore other avenues to strengthen collaboration with the NCPs.

6.27. Dr. Monyneath thanked everyone for their valuable suggestions and comments regarding the agenda. He then turned over the floor to the Chairman of the group, Undersecretary Jonas Leones, to proceed with the remaining items on the agenda.

7. Election of the EAS PC Officers 2025-2028 (EC/33/DOC/07)

7.1. Undersecretary Leones thanked Dr. Monyneath and moved on to the next item, the election of the ESPC officers for the 2025-2028 term. He noted that the PRF would provide updates on the overall process and proposed timelines for the consultation regarding the ESPC elections. He then requested the PRF Secretariat Coordinator to initiate the discussion on this item.

7.2. Ms. Cruzada began by stating that three positions under the EASPC officers will become vacant on July 31, 2025, as the current chairs will complete their terms. The current co-chairs for the technical session, intergovernmental session, and the Partnership Council will assume the positions as chairs for the 2025–2028 term. She informed the group that the call for nominations for the co-chair positions for the period of July 2025 to July 2028 had already begun.

7.3. The nomination process commenced on April 1, with an initial deadline of April 30, as stipulated in the PEMSEA governance guidelines. The Secretariat has received some nominations for co-chairs of the Technical Session and Intergovernmental Session ‘respectively and is waiting for nominations for the Council C-Chair..

7.4. Ms. Cruzada provided a brief overview of the qualifications for candidates: they should have demonstrated leadership, international standing, and preferably, experience in the

EAS region and familiarity with PEMSEA's work. Candidates should be able to represent regional perspectives, either as a country or non-country partner, and be affiliated with the government that has nominated them. A working knowledge of the English language is also required.

7.5. She also highlighted that, as per the governance rules, at least one non-country partner representative should serve as a PC officer, typically the technical session chair or co-chair. All officers and co-chairs will act in their personal capacity, based on their individual qualifications, not their organization's representation. Therefore, she clarified that Partnership Council officers will not represent their respective countries or organizations but will serve in their personal capacity.

7.6. Ms. Cruzada then presented the proposed election timeline:

- The call for nominations will continue through April. If no further nominations are received by the end of this week, the deadline may be extended until at least one nominee per position is secured, potentially extending into the first week of May.

- Consent will be secured from the nominated individuals, and the roster of candidates will be submitted to the Election Board between the first and second weeks of May.

- The first round of email consultations with country and non-country partners will take place in the third and fourth weeks of May to compile a shortlist of nominees.

- If a lone nominee for each post has not been identified, a second round of consultations will be held between May and early June. This will be the final round unless additional nominees are needed, in which case an optional third round may be held.

- Between June and July, the Secretariat will inform the Election Board—comprising the Executive Committee chairs and the Partnership Council—of the results of the consensus-building process.

- The confirmed nominees will formally take their oath and assume office after July 31, 2025, during the PC meeting in July.

7.7. She clarified that during the 17th PC meeting, the current Executive Committee will still be in charge. However, at the 34th EC meeting, scheduled later this year, the new EC committee will take over.

7.8. Ms. Cruzada requested that the current co-chairs present confirm their willingness to assume their roles as PC officers for documentation purposes. She also asked the Executive Committee to approve the proposed timeline for the PC elections.

7.9. **Discussion Highlights:**
Dr. Monyneath suggested that the nomination period be extended until May. In response, Usec. Leones proposed the possibility of extending the nomination period by one week if no nominations are submitted to the Secretariat. He noted that, given the July 31 meeting, the EC could approve a one-week extension, even without holding a meeting. However, he asked if one week would be sufficient or if two weeks would be more realistic.

7.10. He further explained that extending the period for one month might provide more flexibility, allowing nominations to be submitted without the need for additional approval from the EC. If the nomination period was extended for one month, the Secretariat could simply notify the EC if no nominations were received by that time, rather than seeking approval for each extension.

7.11. USec. Leones, Mr. Le and Dr. Kwon verbally confirmed their commitment to serve as EAS PC officers for 2025-2028.

7.12. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the updates on the status of the call for nominations and the election process and provided advice on how to address the lack of nominees by the initial deadline for the call.

7.13. **Recommendations**: Usec. Leones suggested that the extension notice be set for two weeks. If the Secretariat still does not receive any nominations, the extension would automatically be approved for an additional week, without the need for further approval from the EC members.

7.14. **Decision:**

- Usec. Leones, Mr. Le, and Dr. Kwon confirmed their assumption as EAS PC Officers beginning July 31, 2025.
- The Secretariat's request to approve the extension of the call for nominations to two weeks from April 30, with the implicit approval that the nomination call will be extended to May 31 should no nominations be received by May 16.
- The election timeline was approved.

7.15. With no other concerns, Usec. Leones proceeded with the next agenda item, the updates on the Blue Carbon Program.

8. Updates on Blue Carbon Program (EC/33/DOC/08)

8.1. Dr. Keita Furukawa, Chair of the Blue Carbon Technical Working Group, began by providing a brief introductory report, which would be followed by a more detailed presentation from Ms. Cruzada. Dr. Furukawa reminded the group that the PEMC Blue

Carbon program is being developed in alignment with the vision set by the 15th EAS Partners Council in 2023. The initiative has been ongoing since 2017, during which several workshops have been organized, and numerous reports on Blue Carbon actions have been published.

8.2. Dr. Furukawa further elaborated that the regional Blue Carbon Technical Working Group was established following an agreement at the 16th PC meeting, with the goal of developing a Blue Carbon certification program. The first technical working group of the year was held online, and a roadmap was created along with seven key recommendations. While Ms. Cruzada would provide a more detailed explanation, Dr. Furukawa highlighted two points from the recommendations.

8.3. The first point discussed the need to broaden the scope of the Blue Carbon program. Dr. Furukawa emphasized that the focus should not be limited to carbon credit certification but should also encompass broader blue carbon ecosystem services management. This includes not only carbon credit certification but also other valuable benefits that can be derived from the conservation and management of blue carbon ecosystems. Preliminary discussions on this were held in the first technical working group and the blue carbon training workshop in Thailand earlier in March. Dr. Furukawa shared that a zero draft for blue carbon strategies had been prepared, with plans to discuss it further in the second technical working group scheduled for June in China.

8.4. The second point is related to the development of communication strategies. Dr. Furukawa emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive society within the region to achieve sustainable development based on the strategies outlined. He noted that, while the Blue Carbon Program has a mid-term target, it is vital to ensure that youth leaders in the region are actively involved. Dr. Furukawa quoted Dr. Yonvitner, who referred to this as the need to create a “Sea Blue Generation,” which refers to a new generation focused on the Seas of East Asia Blue Carbon network. Maintaining proper communication with those interested in blue carbon actions, especially the youth, is crucial for the success of this initiative.

8.5. Ms. Cruzada followed this by providing a brief recap on the Blue Carbon Programme, describing it as a regional approach to blue carbon management intended to support Country Partners' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), enhance blue carbon ecosystems in the region, protect their diverse ecosystem services, and increase the resilience of coastal communities.

8.6. She noted that Dr. Keita had already discussed the objectives of the programme and proceeded to present a timeline of PEMSEA’s work on blue carbon. Since 2017, PEMSEA has recognized the significant potential of blue carbon in both climate change mitigation and sustaining coastal community well-being. Over the past two years, several studies have been developed to assess the status of blue carbon ecosystems,

market potential, and opportunities for regional collaboration. Key exchanges occurred during the EAS Congresses of 2018, 2021, and 2024.

8.7. During the 15th PC Meeting in July 2023, the development of the Blue Carbon Programme was formally approved, with a vision to establish a regional certification system. In 2024, the PRF—with support from Technical Session Chair Dr. Keita and the PNLC—conducted baseline studies on blue carbon supply, market research, and a comparative review of accounting methodologies from five Country Partners. The results were presented at the EAS Congress 2024, garnering support from various regional organizations.

8.8. To institutionalize the programme's governance, the PC also approved the establishment of a Technical Working Group (TWG), now composed of 19 members from Country and Non-Country Partners, PNLC, and regional/international organizations.

8.9. Ms. Cruzada presented the Blue Carbon Roadmap, initially introduced during the 31st EC Meeting in October 2023. The roadmap outlines immediate, medium-, and long-term targets across four pillars: (1) development of a standardized accounting methodology, (2) research on blue carbon supply, (3) understanding demand, and (4) valuation and certification of blue carbon credits.

8.10. Significant progress has been made in achieving immediate targets. A draft Blue Carbon Accounting Protocol has been disseminated to the TWG for feedback and will be refined further during the second TWG Meeting on 5 June in China. A supply assessment survey was conducted across 29 PNLG member sites, supplemented by desktop research, including national mapping initiatives for mangroves and seagrass.

8.11. On market demand, PEMSEA engaged Ocean Pixel to conduct regional and international market research, which will inform the development of the certification system. An initial concept note on certification has been drafted; however, following TWG inputs, further clarification is needed on whether the certification will focus solely on carbon credits or also include valuation of ecosystem services.

8.12. Ms. Cruzada summarized the key TWG recommendations from the February meeting:

- Broaden the scope of the programme to include socio-economic and ecosystem service valuation alongside carbon credit certification;
- Align the programme with biodiversity and climate targets in the SDS-SEA IP 2023–2027;
- Establish national platforms with standardized protocols for stock and flux assessments;
- Create a regional monitoring network for shared data and stakeholder engagement;
- Establish historical baselines for ecosystem rehabilitation planning;

- Develop a communication strategy to raise awareness and participation at local and academic levels;
- Explore alternative certification instruments such as nature credits and other outcome-based mechanisms;
- Strengthen capacity building for stakeholders, including communities, governments, academia, and emerging market players.

8.13. Next steps include integrating Thailand's blue carbon protocol into the RBCAP, based on methodologies from five other countries (Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, RO Korea, and China). Thailand also expressed interest in further engaging with the TWG, particularly on mangroves and seagrass.

8.14. Following finalization, the protocol will be pilot-tested in selected PNLG or Country Partner sites, with adjustments made as necessary. A business plan for certification and capacity building will also be developed later in the year.

8.15. Ms. Cruzada highlighted ongoing capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities:

- A Blue Carbon Training Workshop in March, co-hosted by the University of Hawai'i and Burapha University, engaged young ocean practitioners from PNLC institutions;
- The second TWG meeting and roadmap review will take place on 5–6 June in Haikou, China, co-hosted by NMHMS and the Green Carbon Foundation;
- PEMSEA will participate in a side event at the UN Ocean Conference on 10 June to present the programme's status;
- The PNLG Forum in Jakarta (16–18 September) will include a technical workshop discussing local government roles in coastal resilience through blue carbon solutions.

8.16. Finally, Ms. Cruzada noted ongoing discussions with partners such as the University of Hawai'i for a follow-up to the March workshop, potentially to be held in the Philippines later this year. She concluded by inviting EC Members to provide comments on the proposed work plan, suggest opportunities for promoting key findings, and identify potential funding avenues to support the sustainability of the programme.

8.17. Usec. Leones opened the floor for discussion.

8.18. **Discussion Highlights:**
Mr. Wang Antao shared updates on related blue carbon initiatives and explored potential linkages with PEMSEA's Blue Carbon Programme.

8.19. He noted that the IOC-WESTPAC is currently implementing a blue carbon project, in which the Third Institute of Oceanography of the Ministry of Natural Resources of China is involved. While he was not aware of any current interactions between this project and

PEMSEA's Blue Carbon Program, he committed to checking further, particularly with Dr. Wenxi Zhu, although it appears the IOC-WESTPAC initiative is more science-focused.

8.20. Ms. Gonzales confirmed that as of now, there are no formal links between PEMSEA and the IOC-WESTPAC blue carbon project nor with the Third Institute of Oceanography.

8.21. Mr. Wang also highlighted ongoing cooperation under the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Programme. The National Marine Hazard and Mitigation Service (NMHMS), under this ministry, is actively participating in the PEMSEA initiative. He shared that in July 2025, a blue carbon workshop will be organized in Haikou City, co-hosted by the Center and the China Ocean Development Foundation, with financial support provided for PEMSEA participants. The workshop aims to foster knowledge exchange and research collaboration on blue carbon ecosystems.

8.22. He further suggested exploring financial opportunities, particularly through the China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), which offers South-South Global Development Funding. This funding is open to international organizations, provided a Chinese institute is part of the project consortium. He proposed the possibility of joint project proposals involving Chinese institutions such as IFIO or TIO, with submission to CIDCA. Upon his return to China, he plans to initiate discussions with CIDCA to assess whether PEMSEA could qualify as an eligible organization to apply for such funding support.

8.23. In determining the direction of the Blue Carbon Programme, USec. Leones raised a clarificatory question on the intention of the initiative. Specifically, he asked whether the program aims to develop a unified, standardized protocol or methodology that will be adopted by all countries in the region. He noted that Thailand has its own protocol and inquired whether this is intended as a model for others, or if the goal is for countries to use their own methods.

8.24. He expressed concern regarding the possible challenges of having different methodologies and standards adopted across various countries. He stated that this could result in difficulties when trying to consolidate or summarize national-level results and activities at the regional level, due to the lack of alignment in protocols. In particular, he emphasized the Philippines' current stage in blue carbon work, sharing that the country recently enacted the Philippine Natural Capital Accounting System (PENCAS) law and is currently drafting its implementing rules and regulations. The Philippines has completed baselining of its mangrove areas and is in the process of finalizing its coral reef inventory and resource assessment, with an atlas soon to be released.

8.25. Ms. Gonzales responded to the concern by clarifying that standardization is not the primary goal of the Blue Carbon Programme. Rather, the first priority is to ensure that

the ecosystem conservation and restoration takes place at the country level, and that the programme is meant to support countries' own blue carbon policies and approaches.

8.26. She explained that the programme will not require all countries to adopt a single methodology, but instead, it aims tol provide technical guidance and templates that countries can choose to apply based on their context. The objective is to offer a range of methodologies and to facilitate mutual learning among countries, which can help ensure national-level actions also contribute to regional coherence.

8.27. She added that this is one of the reasons the TWG is working on developing a certified process that can be acknowledged and recognized both by country and non-country partners, including flexible pathways for certification beyond carbon credits to include ecosystem services valuation.

8.28. Ms. Cruzada further elaborated that the effort to compile and analyze existing methodologies is rooted in science-based approaches, with peer-reviewed articles and methodologies forming the basis of the assessment. Building on the points raised earlier, she emphasized that the TWG is working on developing a tiered approach to guide countries in implementing blue carbon accounting. This includes defining basic features for entry-level approaches and more advanced criteria for countries further along in their development.

8.29. She cited the VERRA standard—an internationally recognized but complex standard for carbon credit certification—as an example of a "gold standard" that is difficult even for developed countries like Japan to meet. Given these challenges, the region needs to develop contextualized standards that reflect local capacities while maintaining scientific integrity.

8.30. The regional standard, therefore, is not meant to be restrictive. Instead, it is envisioned as a tool to facilitate cross-country learning, credit system readiness, and possible future market trading mechanisms, particularly once countries establish their own credit schemes. The regional standard could help serve as a foundation for mutual recognition systems in the future, similar to models like the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

8.31. Ms. Gonzales also acknowledged the urgent need for baseline data and analytics. Although Asia is often described as a "hot spot" for blue carbon ecosystems—rich in mangroves and seagrass—the region lacks comprehensive datasets. The bottom-up approaches currently being pursued by countries such as the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Korea, and China can help fill this gap. Thailand, for example, has already submitted its national protocol, while China initially piloted five methodologies.

8.32. She concluded by highlighting the importance of moving swiftly with the methodology consolidation, noting that many other platforms and forums are already advancing

similar work. If the region can consolidate and share its findings early, it could enhance relevance and avoid duplication or obsolescence of efforts.

8.33. Dr. Monyneath shared that Cambodia has drawn lessons from the experiences of African countries, particularly regarding how mangrove and seagrass ecosystems are measured and accounted for at the local level. He mentioned that there have been initial discussions between Cambodia and UNEP to explore opportunities for learning and collaboration.

8.34. Dr. Monyneath clarified that the government's engagement has been directly with UNEP. The intention is to better understand how UNEP has implemented blue carbon activities in Africa, and whether such approaches can be adapted to Cambodia's context.

8.35. He further noted that while the original project design did not include a specific focus on blue carbon, subsequent reviews and developments have allowed for the inclusion of study components related to blue carbon ecosystems.

8.36. Dr. Monyneath emphasized that such cross-regional learning—particularly how African countries built local-level methodologies and revised their programs based on on-the-ground needs—could be beneficial for PEMSEA and its partners. He encouraged exploring similar collaboration models and south-south learning exchanges within the EAS region and beyond.

8.37. USec. Leones requested the Secretariat to take note of the recommendations and to consider the discussion when they finalize the studies and reports.

8.38. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the updates provided on the PEMSEA Blue Carbon Program, and made comments on the scope and purpose of the program.

8.39. **Recommendations**: The EC provided suggestions on financial opportunities (e.g., CIDCA South-South Global Development Funding), or potential collaborations with other organizations such as UNEP, that are also working on Blue Carbon in the region.

8.40. **Decision:**
The EC noted the workplan for the PEMSEA BC Program.

9. PEMSEA Audit Report (EC/33/DOC/09)

9.1. Ms. Gonzales presented the summary of the Audited Financial Statement for CY 2024, noting that there were no significant findings or observations related to the appropriateness of accounting policies, estimates, and financial statement disclosures.

There were also no uncorrected audit misstatements or significant control deficiencies identified by the external auditors.

9.2. Total receipts for 2024 amounted to USD 3.6 million, which is USD 0.5 million higher than in 2023. This increase was primarily attributed to new projects and services implemented during the year, particularly from concluding in-situ projects and Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) initiatives. A significant portion of funding was also sourced from bilateral grants supporting marine pollution-related projects. Contributions from PEMSEA partners accounted for approximately 49.47% of total receipts.

9.3. The audit report included a number of recommendations presented to the Audit Committee, which was chaired by the Partnership Council Chair. Among these were:

- Upgrading the account mapping to align classifications in the accounting system with those used in financial statements, aimed at minimizing human error and enhancing reporting efficiency and reliability;
- Updating the Great Plains financial software, ensuring that detailed listings reconcile with the trial balances.

9.4. Ms. Gonzales noted that the software upgrade is already underway and is expected to be operational by September 2025.

9.5. Total expenses for the year amounted to USD 3.5 million, reflecting the project-based nature of PEMSEA's operations, with 49% of expenditures allocated to personnel and consultancy services related to ongoing projects. Administrative expenses comprised 10% of total expenditures, of which 7% represented in-kind contributions from the Philippine Government, including PEMSEA's office space and utilities. An increase in the appraised value of these in-kind contributions was observed following valuation by the external auditor, based on comparable commercial space within the DENR compound.

9.6. Ms. Gonzales expressed concern that this revaluation may impact future in cash support from the host government but hoped that support—especially in hosting the upcoming Partnership Council Meeting in July—would continue, as this still represents a substantial contribution.

9.7. Some minor discrepancies were also noted in the financial reporting due to differing reporting formats and schedules across projects, particularly for projects administered through entities such as UNDP and other bilateral mechanisms. These inconsistencies, however, were described as minor and non-fraudulent, arising from differences in financial documentation timelines and reconciliation practices. The auditor emphasized the importance of regular reconciliation between detailed listings and trial balances on a quarterly basis.

9.8. In closing, Ms. Gonzales informed the Council that the Audit Committee has reviewed and endorsed the 2024 Audited Financial Report, and she requested the Council's approval and endorsement to formally submit the report.

9.9. The Co-Chair acknowledged the PRF for its efforts in preparing the 2024 Audited Financial Statement. He noted that while there were minor recommendations for improvement, overall, the PRF has done a commendable job in managing and auditing expenditures.

9.10. He opened the floor for comments or inputs. With no further remarks from the Council, the Co-Chair confirmed the Council's approval of the 2024 Audited Financial Statement for submission to the BIR.

9.11. **Decision:**
The EC approved the Audit Report.

10. Any Other Businesses (EC/33/DOC/10)

10.1. Usec. Leones requested Ms. Cruzada to present the last agenda item.

10.2. Ms. Cruzada briefly provided an update regarding the upcoming selection process for the next Executive Director of PEMSEA. She reminded the Council that EDA's term will end in December 2026. Given the extensive application process, the Secretariat has already drafted the terms of reference (TOR) for the Executive Director position for the 2027-2029 term, as outlined in EC Document 33, Annex 1.

10.3. The selection process will begin once the Executive Committee (EC) approves the TOR. Recruitment will take place between May 2025 and March 2026. During this period, the TOR will be published on the PEMSEA website and relevant recruitment platforms. Once applications are received, the Secretariat will create a shortlist and submit it to the selection committee for review between March and April 2026.

10.4. From April to June 2026, the selection committee will conduct interviews with the shortlisted candidates, potentially involving external reviewers from major sponsoring agencies or country partners. After completing the interviews, the Secretariat will prepare a report and present it to the committee for final review. The selected candidate will then be presented for approval at the EAS Partnership Council (PC) meeting.

10.5. Following the PC's approval, an offer letter will be issued to the chosen candidate. In the final quarter of 2026, an orientation and transition period will be scheduled between the outgoing and incoming Executive Directors. The new Executive Director will assume their role in January 2027.

10.6. **Discussion Highlights:**

Usec. Leones sought clarification on whether the inclusion of external reviewers in the Executive Director selection process is a requirement or merely an option. He expressed a preference to confine the selection process to EC members but deferred the final decision to the group. He also raised the issue of setting age limits in case external parties express interest in joining the selection process, and emphasized that the EC should ultimately decide on the matter.

10.7. Ms. Gonzales explained that during her own recruitment as Executive Director, the selection process was conducted solely by the three designated chairs: the Council Chair, the Intergovernmental Session Chair, and the Technical Session Chair. The Secretariat, specifically the HR unit, served as the secretariat to the process, providing administrative and logistical support. She suggested that the current EC could revisit and assess whether this composition remains appropriate and applicable for the upcoming selection.

10.8. Ms. Cruzada added that as indicated in the Rules of Governance, the inclusion of the external reviewers will be upon the decision of the selection committee.

10.9. Ms. Cruzada also noted that there is no age limit in the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the Executive Director position. She proposed that the Secretariat could conduct further research on comparable TORs, share the findings with the EC during the intersessional period, and allow the EC members to review and decide on the matter accordingly. She added that this would allow the EC flexibility to assess whether setting an age limit aligns with the organization's governance practices and ensures inclusivity while maintaining the merit-based nature of the selection process.

10.10. Dr. Furukawa expressed that setting an age limitation presents a challenge, especially given the level of experience required to handle the unique and complex systems managed by PEMSEA. He noted that many individuals remain active and capable well into their senior years. Therefore, imposing an age cap could result in the exclusion of highly qualified and experienced candidates. He emphasized the trade-off between age and accumulated expertise, noting that it often takes years to build the necessary experience for such a leadership role.

10.11. He added that while some individuals may acquire significant leadership skills by age 40 or 50, others reach that level of readiness later. Thus, setting the age limit too low—such as 60—might be restrictive. He recommended that the organization strike a balance between requiring a minimum of ten years of international experience and considering age flexibility to attract the most qualified candidates.

10.12. In response, Usec. Leones shared that, in the Philippine government, the mandatory retirement age is 65, while retirement at 60 is optional. He questioned the basis for proposing an age limit of 60 in the TOR, and deferred to the group for further consideration.

10.13. Under "Any Other Business," Usec Leones invited Ms. Yeajin from KMI to share updates. Ms. Yeajin, shared that an international Blue Carbon Seminar will be held on May 1–2 in Yeongdo, South Korea. The seminar was initiated through the efforts of the Working Group and the vision of Dr. Seokjae Kwon, incoming Technical Session Chair, to support PEMSEA's future blue carbon research initiatives.

10.14. Jointly organized by KIOST and KMI, the seminar—titled Climate Change Adaptation and Navigating the Future: Harmonization of Blue Carbon and Fisheries for a Sustainable Ocean—will feature expert presentations on sustainable finance, ocean resilience, carbon allocation, emission trading schemes, and collaborative research. Speakers include Professor Susuke Magani (Kyushu University), Professor Jin Lee (Xiamen University), Dr. Hanson Park (KIOST), and Ms. Yeajin herself. Technical Chair Ms. Geeta Phulkola will moderate the panel discussion.

10.15. The discussion aims to explore long-term sustainability and collaborative potential of blue carbon research through PEMSEA, especially as the current Working Group is temporary in nature. Regular updates will be provided to the PEMSEA Partnership Council moving forward.

10.16. USec. Leones thanked Dr. Yeajin for sharing the program and then opened the floor for any questions and discussions before passing the floor to Ms. Cruzada for last reminders.

10.17. With no other questions or concerns, Ms. Cruzada provided the final logistical reminders for the delegation. Registration for the event will take place tomorrow, April 29, from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. The call time for PEMSEA AC members staying at the Ramada Hotel is at 7:30 a.m. Various transportation options are available, including a shuttle service provided by the OOC Secretariat from Grand Chosun Busan, which is a five to ten-minute walk from the hotel. Other transport options such as public bus or subway, both directly connected to BEXCO, were also mentioned.

10.18. She also reminded the Council that PEMSEA's side event will be held on April 29 from 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. in Room 216, with the theme "Establishing a Regional Collaborative Network of Marine Protected Areas in the EAS Region." All delegates were encouraged to attend, with Dr. Monyneath and Usec. Jonas specifically requested to deliver the opening remarks. The event builds on the pre-workshop conducted from April 26 to 27 and will include guided discussions with representatives of regional organizations in the East Asian Seas.

10.19. Busan Metropolitan City has extended an invitation to the PEMSEA delegation for a networking dinner on April 29 at Paradise Hotel Busan. A shuttle will be provided, and delegates were advised to be at the designated pick-up area near the registration booth at BEXCO by 6:10 p.m.

10.20. On April 30, PEMSEA will collaborate with Busan Metropolitan City on a side event titled “Global Ocean City Innovation Network,” scheduled from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. in Room 216. All are encouraged to attend. This will be followed by a luncheon hosted by Busan from 12:30 to 2:00 p.m. at Yeje Korean Restaurant near Haeundae Beach. Transfer will be provided, and delegates joining are advised to proceed to Room 216 beforehand.

10.21. The afternoon field visit is scheduled at 2:40 p.m. While EC members are not required to attend PEMSEA’s technical meeting with Busan—focused on preparations for the 2026 PNLG Forum—they are welcome to enjoy leisure time at Haeundae Beach. The cultural tour will include a traditional makgeolli fermentation experience and a visit to Haedong Yonggungsa Temple. Transportation will be provided throughout and back to the hotel afterward.

10.22. **Conclusion:** The EC noted the selection process for the ED, with consideration to refine the TOR in terms of setting an age limit. The EC also noted with appreciation the initiative of KMI and KIOST to co-organize an International Blue Carbon Seminar, expressing that the findings will be beneficial for the PEMSEA Blue Carbon program.

10.23. **Recommendations**:

- The EC suggested to reconsider inclusion of external reviewers in the selection and to only consult with them during the background review of applicants
- The EC recommended to include an age limit in the TOR for the Executive Director, subject to consideration of PEMSEA Rules of Governance.

10.24. **Decision:** The EC approved the TOR and Selection process of the ED for 2027-2029, subject to further edits based on recommendations.Once the pending items have been clarified and finalized with PEMSEA’s recruitment specialist,, the TOR will be submitted to the Executive Committee for formal adoption.[1]

11. Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations

[1] *Please note that the ED requested the PEMSEA's recruitment specialist to check with other UN bodies and regional organizations on current practice on specifying the age bracket of prospective applicants.Her review indicates that 'International organizations typically do not specify age limits for recruitment. However, candidates should ideally be far enough from mandatory retirement age to ensure a reasonable tenure'.*

The ED wrote an email to the EC members of May 8, 2025 and received feedback noting the findings from both the Council Co-Chair and Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair. With this the ED propose that the EC endorse the TOR for the recruitment of the PRF ED to the 17th EAS PC for approval

11.1. Ms. Cruzada presented the summary of conclusions and recommendations outlined in this document for approval of the Executive Committee. She added that any further edits or comments on the summaries of conclusions and recommendations could be provided during the review of the full proceedings.

11.2. She then outlined the schedule for the release of the proceedings: the Secretariat will complete the draft from May 2 to 18, and it will be submitted to the EC for review, comments, and approval from May 18 to 23. The aim is to receive approval before May 23, after which the proceedings will be published and disseminated to the Partnership Council by May 24.

11.3. **Decision**: The summary of conclusions and recommendations was approved, subject to enhancement in the meeting proceedings.

12. Closing of the Meeting

12.1. USec. Leones delivered his closing remarks, thanking everyone for their active participation and valuable contributions to the discussion. He expressed his sincere appreciation for the productive dialogue and thoughtful insights shared throughout the session. He acknowledged that the meeting provided important guidance on several critical matters that would steer collective efforts in the coming months. He also thanked their host, KIOST, Dr. Ju Yong Ryu, and President Dr. Lee Hyi Seung, for their support.

12.2. The updates on the East Asian Seas Congress 2024 and the progress on implementing the Xiamen International Declaration gave the group a clear path forward. Discussions on aligning the SDS-SEA with the 2030 Agenda further demonstrated their commitment to the long-term sustainable development of shared marine resources.

12.3. He commended the PRF, led by Ms. Aimee Gonzales, for their comprehensive updates and diligent work in advancing initiatives. The progress of the Blue Carbon Program, under the Technical Working Group chaired by Dr. Keita Furukawa, was particularly encouraging and showed promise for significant impact in the region. The preparations for the 17th East Asia Seas Partnership Council meeting and the election of new PC officers would ensure continuity in the governance structure. These efforts, along with the financial oversight provided today, reflected the shared commitment to PEMSEA's institutional standards.

12.4. Usec Leones extended special thanks to KIOST once again for their excellent arrangements and warm hospitality in beautiful Busan. He also commended the Secretariat for their seamless organization of the hybrid meeting.

12.5. As they move forward, he emphasized the importance of maintaining their collaborative approach in addressing challenges facing coastal and marine environments. The

decisions made today would contribute significantly to sustainable coastal development across the East Asian Seas region.

12.6. He concluded by declaring the 33rd meeting of the PEMSEA Executive Committee closed, and thanked everyone once again. He informed the members that the next meeting would be held in July in the Philippines.

12.7. The meeting was adjourned at 17:35.

Annex 1. Agenda of the 33rd Executive Committee Meeting

Time		Agenda	Speaker
14:00 - 14:05	**1.0**	**Opening of the Meeting and Approval of the Meeting Agenda** The Council Chair will open the 33rd Executive Committee meeting and request the secretariat to present the Meeting Agenda for review/approval of the Executive Committee (EC)	**Dr. Vann Monyneath** East Asian Seas (EAS) Partnership Council (PC) Chair
14:05 - 14:25	**2.0**	**East Asian Seas Congress 2024: Summary Report and Ways Forward** The Secretariat will present the summary report and ways forward to implement the recommendations of the EAS Congress sessions and Xiamen Ministerial Declaration	**Introduction** **MNR representative** **Ms. Abigail Fiona Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator
14:25 - 14:55	**3.0**	**SDS-SEA Alignment to 2030** The Secretariat will discuss the plans and progress to refine SDS-SEA and extend targets to 2030	**Ms. Aimee Gonzales** PRF Executive Director/ **Kathrine G. Aguiling** Consultant (online)
14:55 - 15:25	**4.0**	**PRF Updates for 2024 and 2025** PRF will present the key accomplishments of PRF as technical and secretariat in 2024, as well as plans for the year 2025.	**Ms. Aimee Gonzales** PRF Executive Director
15:15 - 15:25	**5.0**	**17th EAS Partnership Council Dates and Agenda** PRF will present updates on the upcoming 17th EAS PC Dates and Provisional Agenda.	**Ms. Abigail Fiona Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator
15:25 - 15:45	**6.0**	**Non-Country Partner Review** PRF will present the current status of the 22 NCPs and their engagements with PEMSEA.	**Ms. Francesca Cortez** PRF Assistant to Secretariat Coordinator
15:45 - 15:55	**7.0**	**Election of the EAS PC Officers 2025-2028** PRF will present updates on the call for nominations and the proposed timeline for consultations of the EAS PC Elections.	**Ms. Abigail Fiona Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator
15:55 - 16:15	**8.0**	**Updates on Blue Carbon Program** PRF will present updates on the status of the Blue Carbon Program, including the	**Dr. Keita Furukawa,** Chair of BC TWG **&** **Ms. Abigail Fiona Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator

		establishment of the Blue Carbon TWG and baseline research outputs	
16:15 - 16:25	**9.0**	**Audit Report** PRF will present the Audited Financial Report for CY 2024.	**Ms. Aimee Gonzales** PRF Executive Director
16:25 - 16:45	**10.0**	**Any Other Business** 1. Selection of PRF Executive Director for 2027-2029 2. Election of the PNLG Officers 3. PRF will share information on Our Ocean Conference side event 4. Executive Committee Members may take this opportunity to raise governance-related concerns.	**Ms. Abigail Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator
16:45 - 16:55		**Coffee Break**	
16:55 - 17:00	**11.0**	**Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations**	**Ms. Abigail Cruzada** PRF Secretariat Coordinator
17:00 - 17:05		**Closing Remarks**	**USEC. Jonas Leones** East Asian Seas (EAS) Partnership Council (PC) Co-Chair

Annex 2. Links to Meeting documents, photos and presentations

A. Meeting documents - 33rd EC Meeting documents - Google Drive
B. Main presentation - Link
C. Dr. Yeajin Jung Presentation - Link
D. Photos - 33rd Executive Committee Meeting Photos

Annex 3. List of Participants

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Dr. Vann MONYNEATH
EAS PC Chair and Undersecretary of State
Ministry of Environment
Cambodia

Mr. Jonas Leones
EAS PC Co-Chair and Undersecretary for Policy, Planning and International Affairs
Department of Environment and Natural Resources
Philippines

Dr. Keita FURUKAWA
Technical Session Chair and President of the
Association for Shore Environment Creation (NPO)
Japan

Dr. Suk-Jae KWON
Technical Session Co-Chair
Korea Institute for Ocean Science and Technology
RO Korea

Mr. Le Dai THANG
Intergovernmental Session Co-Chair and Deputy Director
Bureau of Marine Resources Control and Marine Island Environment Protection
Viet Nam Administration of Seasand Islands
Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
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OBSERVERS

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Ms. Jeanne Francesca Cortez
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Ms. Kate Aguiling (Online)
PRF Consultant
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Ms. Mary Ann Dela Pena (Online)
Finance Specialist
PEMSEA Resource Facility

Mr. John Castillo (Online)
Visual Communications Officer
PEMSEA Resource Facility