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**TERMS OF REFERENCE**
**RESEARCH INTERN – BLUE FOODS IN THE EAST ASIAN SEAS REGION**

## General Information

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| **Reference:** | VA/INTERNSHIP/PRF/2026/007 |
| **Title:** | Research Intern – Blue Foods in the East Asian Seas Region |
| **Duty Station:** | PEMSEA Resource Facility, Quezon City, Philippines |
| **Duration of Assignment:** | Twenty (20) weeks, January to May 2027 |
| **Reporting to:** | Office of the Executive Director |
| **Type of Assignment:** | Internship (Regional Scoping and Strategic Assessment of Blue Foods in the EAS Region) |

## BACKGROUND

PEMSEA (Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia) is a regional cooperation mechanism whose mission is to promote sustainable development of coastal and marine areas. It comprises of 11 country and 22 non country partners in the East Asian Seas region who are committed to implement a joint regional strategy called the 'Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia' (SDS-SEA). The PEMSEA Resource Facility serves as the technical and secretariat arm of the Partnership.

The East Asian Seas (EAS) region is the global epicenter of aquatic food ("blue food") production, trade and consumption, accounting for roughly 70% of global blue food production across marine capture fisheries, coastal mariculture and inland aquaculture. Blue foods, comprising fish, invertebrates, algae and aquatic plants, are foundational to regional food security, micronutrient nutrition, coastal livelihoods and blue economy growth.

Despite their dominance, blue foods are frequently siloed within traditional fisheries and aquaculture mandates rather than integrated into broader national food systems, climate adaptation and mitigation strategies (such as Nationally Determined Contributions), and nutrition policies. Rapid coastal urbanization, overfishing, habitat degradation, climate change and post-harvest losses threaten the sustainability and equity of these systems.

The Research Intern will support the PEMSEA Resource Facility in the regional scoping and strategic assessment of blue foods in the EAS region, covering the South China Sea, Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, East China Sea, Yellow Sea and adjacent brackish and freshwater basins. Specifically, the intern will compile baseline data on production, nutrition and economic value; map how blue foods are reflected in national food security, blue economy and climate policies; catalog regional programs and best practices; summarize key challenges facing the sector; and help translate the findings into structured summaries and visual briefs for an internal discussion paper.

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**DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Under the direct supervision of the Office of the Executive Director, the Research Intern will carry out the following duties and responsibilities. Percentages indicate the approximate share of time over the placement:

I. **State of Blue Foods Data Compilation (25%)**

- **Production and diversity:** Extract and organize secondary data on production volumes, economic value and key species groups across marine capture fisheries, mariculture (fed and unfed, such as bivalves and seaweeds) and inland aquaculture, using FAO, SEAFDEC and national databases.
- **Nutrition and consumption:** Compile literature and data on per capita aquatic food consumption and micronutrient profiles (e.g., omega-3s, iron, zinc, vitamin A) in EAS countries.
- **Livelihoods and equity:** Gather existing demographic data on small-scale fisheries and aquaculture (SSFA) actors, focusing on available statistics on women, youth and coastal communities.

II. **Policy and Institutional Mapping (20%)**

- **National policy review:** Conduct desk reviews of national agriculture and fisheries master plans, food security strategies and nutrition policies across selected EAS countries to log mentions of blue foods.
- **Regional frameworks:** Summarize how blue foods align with key regional mechanisms, including the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework, the SDS-SEA and the RPOA-IUU.
- **Climate policy tracking:** Review updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) of EAS countries using a standardized checklist to track references to fisheries, aquaculture and coastal ecosystems.

III. **Literature Review of Programs and Best Practices (20%)**

- **R&D landscape:** Create an inventory of key regional research institutions (e.g., SEAFDEC, WorldFish, PEMSEA, national marine institutes) and summarize recent publications on aquafeed innovation, selective breeding and digital traceability.
- **Case study profiling:** Draft short profiles (1–2 pages each) of three to four documented best practices in the region, covering topics such as Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture (IMTA), community-managed Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and cold-chain and circular economy initiatives.

IV. **Synthesis of Challenges and Risk Drivers (10%)**

- Categorize recurring challenges identified in recent regional reports across three pillars: ecological (overfishing, IUU fishing, habitat loss in mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs, marine pollution and climate stressors); supply chain (post-harvest losses, aquatic disease outbreaks and barriers to smallholder finance); and governance (institutional silos between ministries and gaps in small-scale producer representation).

V. **Inputs to Recommendations and Internal Discussion Paper (15%)**

- Organize findings into a structured matrix of potential policy, technical and regional cooperation entry points for internal team review.
- Prepare draft report sections, a slide deck or a two-page internal summary brief highlighting key takeaways.

VI. **Consultation and Workshop Support (10%)**

- Assist with scheduling, prepare background notes, and take detailed minutes during Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and the internal or stakeholder validation workshop.
- Synthesize participant feedback and provide logistical support for the internal or regional review session, with the support of the PRF Secretariat.

## EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

| Target Timeline | Deliverables |
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| **Week 3** | **Workplan and Annotated Bibliography:** Detailed research schedule, initial list of data sources and literature, and draft policy tracking template |
| **Week 8** | **Policy and Data Repository:** Populated Excel database of EAS production and nutrition statistics and a comparative policy mapping matrix (NDCs, food security plans) |
| **Week 14** | **Draft Section Inputs and Case Studies:** Written draft report covering baseline trends, literature synthesis of challenges, and three to four short case study profiles for integration into the main report |
| **Week 17** | **Workshop Documentation:** Notes, synthesis of participant feedback, and logistical support for the internal or regional review session, with the support of the PRF Secretariat |
| **Week 20** | **Finalized Inputs and Summary Deck:** Revised report incorporating feedback, plus a slide deck or two-page internal summary brief highlighting key takeaways |

**Internship Arrangements**

- **Supervision:** Weekly check-ins with the supervisor to review research progress, refine analytical framing and provide career development feedback; monthly accomplishment reports, a mid-term review and an end-of-placement assessment. A monthly workplan will break down the tasks in this TOR into manageable portions.
- **Research approach:** Primarily desk-based research, reviewing peer-reviewed literature (e.g., Blue Food Assessment outputs), FAO and SEAFDEC statistical databases and national policy repositories, and populating a structured Excel or database matrix

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provided by the supervisor to compare EAS countries across key policy indicators, with guided exposure to stakeholder engagement.

- **Orientation:** Integrated coastal management (ICM), source-to-sea governance and code of conduct, followed by role-specific learning.
- **Support:** Stipend or cost-of-living allowance and work-related travel and subsistence where applicable. Interns are expected to use their own laptop.
- **Conditions:** Code of conduct, data privacy and consent, publication clearance, intellectual property and systems access rules; safeguarding and grievance procedures apply.
- **Completion:** Review of outputs against deliverables, organized files, process documentation, data and product handover, an exit interview, and a certificate of completion.

## QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS REQUIRED

**Eligibility:** Filipino citizen, aged 18 to 30, and available for the full twenty (20)-week placement.

**Education:** Recent Bachelor's degree in marine policy, fisheries management, environmental economics, marine science or a closely related field. Final-year undergraduate or early Master's students are also encouraged to apply.

**Experience:** Academic research experience, including thesis work, internships, research assistantships or volunteer work, involving literature review and data organization.

**Technical Skills:**

- Strong academic research, literature synthesis and data organization skills.
- Foundational academic understanding of ocean governance, sustainable aquaculture, fisheries management or food systems in the East Asian Seas region.
- Ability to take accurate notes during interviews and workshops and to synthesize feedback.
- Detail-oriented and a proactive learner.
- Comfortable working collaboratively in a remote or hybrid research environment.

**Language Requirement:** Fluency in English, with clear, concise and structured writing skills and the ability to summarize complex technical papers into structured notes.

**Technological Skills:** Proficiency in MS Office or Google Workspace, particularly Excel/Google Sheets for basic data cleaning and visualization, and online meeting platforms such as Zoom.

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**SELECTION PROCESS**

Applications are first screened for eligibility and completeness. Eligible applicants are then assessed by a panel of PEMSEA representatives on motivation, subject foundation, research and writing skills, and communication, followed by an interview of shortlisted applicants.

Applicants are requested to submit a cover letter with statement of availability and CV with names and contact details of two (2) references, via email to recruitment@pemsea.org. Kindly indicate the vacancy reference number and title in the subject line: VA/INTERNSHIP/PRF/2026/007– Research Intern – Blue Foods in the East Asian Seas Region.

Deadline of application is on December 10, 2026. Only shortlisted candidates will be notified. For more information on PEMSEA, please visit www.pemsea.org.