



Report of the Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on Marine Litter of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)

19 June 2025, Manila, Philippines

UNEP/COBSEA WGML 7/5



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The Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) is a regional intergovernmental mechanism and one of 18 Regional Seas programmes. It is the decision-making body for the East Asian Seas Action Plan, bringing together nine countries – Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Viet Nam – in protection and sustainable development of the marine and coastal environment. COBSEA focuses on marine pollution, ecosystem-based marine and coastal planning and management, and ocean governance. The COBSEA Secretariat is hosted by Thailand and administered by UNEP. www.cobsea.org

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Introduction

The Seventh Meeting of the COBSEA Working Group on Marine Litter (WGML) was held in a hybrid format on 19 June 2025, welcoming the Working Group focal points, COBSEA country representatives, and observers. The Meeting focused on discussing the progress of marine litter activities related to the COBSEA Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI). This report summarizes the discussions, key outcomes, and follow-up actions from the Meeting.



1. Opening of the Meeting

Ms. Hyunjeong Jin, Associate Programme Officer on Marine Pollution (UNV) in the COBSEA Secretariat, opened the hybrid Meeting at 9:00 (UTC+8) on June 19, 2025. Ms. Nonglak Suebsoh on behalf of Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, the COBSEA Coordinator, delivered opening remarks on behalf of the COBSEA Secretariat. Following this, Ms. Melody Ovenden, Senior Environment Specialist, Climate Change, Resilience, and Environment Cluster of the Asia Development Bank, provided additional opening remarks. Ms. Jin then presented an overview of the agenda.

Representatives of each COBSEA participating country provided brief introductions.

2. Organization of work

Countries agreed to the suggestion by the Secretariat that the latter act as Chair for the Meeting, as it took place during the intersessional period between Intergovernmental Meeting (IGM). The Secretariat specified that the Meeting would be conducted in a hybrid format between 9:00 to 17:00 (UCT+8) on 19 June 2025 and provided the meeting documents. All meeting documents are available on the Papersmart Portal at: <https://resolutions.unep.org/resolutions/?q=WGML-7>

3. Progress against the biennial workplan for implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI) 2025-2026

3.1 Updates on marine litter action from participating countries

Representatives of COBSEA participating countries provided updates on progress toward national politics and interventions related to plastic pollution and marine litter, in line with the RAP MALI.

Cambodia provided an overview of ongoing efforts to combat plastic pollution through laws, regulations, and strategies, including the Cambodia National Waste Management Strategy and Action Plan. The country promotes waste reduction, recycling, and environmentally sound disposal, working with ASEAN, the Government of Japan, GIZ, and other partners on land- and sea-based sources. Key initiatives include public awareness campaigns across 25 provinces, data collection, and capacity building. Cambodia highlights the need for improved waste management infrastructure, stronger monitoring, and greater marine litter focus. The country emphasizes regional collaboration, sustainable consumption, and innovation in financing and circular business models to advance plastic pollution solutions.

China reported significant progress in marine litter prevention and control, maintaining relatively low levels of litter in coastal waters. China strengthened laws, including revisions to the Marine Environmental Protection Law, assigning responsibility to local governments for monitoring, collection, and disposal. National cleanup campaigns and long-term governance mechanisms have been established. Monitoring since 2007 shows plastic accounts for 90% of marine litter. The Blue Circle Initiative, honored with the UN Champions of the Earth Award, promotes fisherfolk-led collections. China advances source control, bans plastic waste imports, and promotes plastic alternatives.

Indonesia shared ongoing and completed efforts to address marine litter, including marine debris and microplastic monitoring in 15 provinces in collaboration with eight universities. Large-scale coastal cleanups are conducted with local governments, NGOs, universities, companies, and communities. Green infrastructure projects support waste management in underserved locations. Indonesia implements key regulations such as Presidential Regulation No. 83/2018 and Ministerial Regulation No. 75/2019, achieving notable reductions in plastic waste. Recent initiatives include national circular letters on waste management acceleration, packaging reuse, and village waste management. Efforts focus on regulation, circular economy, behavior change, capacity building, and strengthening local government roles.

The Republic of Korea shared progress in implementing the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter. A national consultative body coordinates efforts to address litter from rivers, with strengthened

cooperation among ministries, local governments, and partners. The country promotes coastal cleanups, including private sector-led initiatives like the *Adopt a Coastal Line* program. Korea advances fishing gear management through deposit systems, eco-friendly gear promotion, and gear marking regulations. Infrastructure improvements include litter interception in rivers. Korea highlights opportunities to enhance awareness, private sector participation, and regional collaboration to reduce marine litter and protect the marine environment for future generations.

Malaysia reported strong policy and programmatic efforts to address plastic pollution. Key frameworks include the *Roadmap Towards Zero Single-Use Plastics (2018–2030)*, *National Plastic Sustainability Roadmap (2021–2030)*, and *National Marine Litter Policy and Action Plan (2021–2030)*. Initiatives include pilot bans on single-use plastics in several states, deployment of Mobula 8 waste collection vessels, recycling vending machines, green lifestyle campaigns, and school education programs. Malaysia highlights the need for stronger state-level enforcement, multi-stakeholder coordination, technical training on monitoring (including microplastics), and mandatory extended producer responsibility. Opportunities lie in scaling community cleanups, digital citizen science, and integrating plastic education in schools.

The Philippines reported major progress in addressing plastic pollution. The *Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) Act (2022)* shifts waste management responsibility to producers, with nearly 1,000 enterprises submitting programs. In 2024, 33% of plastic footprints were diverted, exceeding targets. An EPR portal and guidelines for incentives are being developed. The Philippines supports the National Plastic Action Partnership and promotes circular economy measures through its Green Economy Program. Marine litter monitoring in Manila Bay, in partnership with South Korea, shows plastics dominate collected debris. A marine cleanup vessel will soon be deployed, complementing capacity-building efforts and community awareness initiatives.

Singapore launched its National Action Strategy on Marine Litter (NASML) in 2022, led by the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment and involving multiple agencies. The strategy targets both land- and sea-based sources through stringent waste management, circular economy initiatives, and rigorous maritime enforcement. Key efforts include advanced microplastic removal technologies, outreach programs, and a forthcoming beverage container return scheme (2026). A 2024 study found most marine litter originates from sea-based and transboundary sources, validating Singapore's intensified cleanup during monsoon seasons. Singapore emphasizes international cooperation and continuous enhancement of waste management to tackle marine litter effectively.

Thailand updated ongoing comprehensive efforts to address plastic pollution and marine litter through integrated policy, regulation, public engagement, and scientific monitoring. The country is implementing its Plastic Waste Management Roadmap (2023–2027) aiming to reduce marine plastic leakage by 50%. Key actions include banning single-use plastics and foam in national parks, drafting sustainable packaging legislation, and promoting circular economy practices. Public awareness campaigns and cleanup initiatives such as Mission 2025 and the 72 Beaches Project engage communities and stakeholders. Thailand continues to advance microplastic monitoring and emphasizes regional collaboration under the RAP MALI framework to protect the marine environment.

Viet Nam reported limited marine litter updates due to significant political and administrative restructuring in the first half of 2025. The country revised its constitution, reducing coastal

provinces from 28 to 21 out of 34 provinces, increasing focus on marine plastic pollution across 60% of provinces. Government ministries were reorganized, merging environment and agriculture sectors, which resolved overlaps in marine plastic and fishing gear management. This structural change streamlines policies and actions on plastic waste management. Vietnam remains engaged with regional processes, including participation in the third United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3), and looks forward to advancing marine litter management in the region.

3.2 Presentation of achievements and project pipeline

Ms. Ana Kumarasamy Associate Programme Officer in Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter in the COBSEA Secretariat proceeded to present the progress report on the biennial workplan for implementation of the RAP MALI 2025-2026 as contained in UNEP/COBSEA WGML 7/3. She highlighted the progress made across the workplan and the activities expected to be completed. A speaker from the “Marine litter prevention through reduction, sustainable design and recycling of plastic packaging in the East Asian Seas” (MA-RE DESIGN) project was invited to present project updates.

Ms. Charurin Pholhinkong from the Deutsche Gesellschaft fuer Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) elaborated on the implementation of the MA-Re DESIGN project by GIZ and the World Wide Fund (WWF), including on single use plastics, EPR and activities in two municipalities in Thailand. Dr. Ana Kumarasamy further provided updates on the COBSEA led Output 4, highlighting the development of case studies on behavioral change and sectorial guidelines for plastic free schools. The project will be completed by July 2026.

3.3 Priorities and opportunities for biennial workplan 2027-2028

The Secretariat shared updates on project pipelines currently under development. Dr. Kumarasamy briefed on three potential proposals for 2026-2028 supported for the ZUG Grant Programme against Marine Litter led by WWF-Germany, UNOPS and ZMT, focusing on procurement monitoring, and education, respectively. Ms. Jin provided updates on a proposal for Abandoned, Lost or otherwise Discarded Fishing Gear (ALDFG) prevention and reduction, currently under consideration for funding by the Government of Republic of Korea. The proposal, submitted in February 2025 and now under review, will contribute to RAP MALI Action 2 and 4. Ms. Jin noted that Indonesia and Viet Nam are the target countries, with potential to include a regional component to strengthen knowledge sharing, coordination and peer learning across all nine COBSEA participating countries.

The Secretariat invited countries to share priorities and opportunities for the development of the next biennial workplan 2027-2028. Ms. Jin proposed to circulate a draft biennial workplan well in advance of the next Working Group meeting in 2026, inviting written input and, if needed, conducting a brief online consultation. This would allow countries to review and provide feedback on the initial draft ahead of the meeting, ensuring collaborative elaboration of the workplan, as in previous cycles.

Singapore noted no specific suggestions at this stage but highlighted the importance of aligning the next biennial workplan with developments under the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), including the potential adoption of a global plastics treaty following INC-5.2 in August 2025. Singapore suggested that COBSEA could build on areas of consensus emerging from the INC process to contribute to agreed regional priorities. It was further noted that while COBSEA would not cover the full life cycle of plastics, the workplan could focus on specific, relevant areas to support common priorities among participating countries.

China proposed focusing under Action 1 on addressing plastic leakage through collection, utilization, and disposal of plastic waste. For Action 2, China supported cooperation with organizations such as FAO and IMO, and voluntary riverine and coastal clean-ups based on national conditions and capacities. Under Action 3, China emphasized authoritative institutions for monitoring, supported scientifically sound plans aligned with international methods, and offered to share its marine litter monitoring data and methods to avoid duplication. For Action 4, China supported cooperation with global and regional organizations, awareness-raising, education, and clean-ups, stressing the need to enhance governance, reflect national views, and avoid duplication.

GIZ highlighted the importance of not only collecting data but also strengthening how data is monitored, analyzed, and used to support effective planning and action. Reflecting on discussions during the ADB Circular Economy Forum 2025 and COBSEA's work on data collection, GIZ emphasized the value of improving data processes to inform policy development.

4. Update on regional mechanisms for marine litter

4.1 The Regional capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a Regional Activity Centre

The Secretariat referred to the Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a COBSEA Regional Activity Centre (RAC) on marine litter, highlighting its establishment in line with IGM 24 resolution and the Government of Indonesia's proposal. RC3S operates under the authority of the IGM and the guidance of the COBSEA Secretariat, aiming to decentralize activities and strengthen technical and financial capacity to support the implementation of the RAP MALI. RC3S's hosting agreement with UNEP COBSEA is under finalization, with a strategic plan and biennial workplan for 2025-2026 endorsed at IGM 26.

On behalf of Indonesia, Ms. Dyah Poerwayanti provided an update on progress, challenges, and commitments regarding RC3S as a COBSEA RAC on marine litter. Since its establishment, RC3S has been instrumental in knowledge sharing, capacity building, and innovative solutions addressing marine litter, nutrient pollution, and wastewater management. Indonesia is currently advancing critical legal and administrative frameworks to formalize RC3S's mandate, including a ministerial decree aligned with national environmental laws. Coordination efforts with relevant ministries, including Foreign Affairs and Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, aim to harmonize national and regional priorities.

Indonesia outlined a timeline to finalize draft regulations and host country agreements by the end of 2025, with plans to operationalize RC3S as a fully functioning Regional Activity Centre in 2026, launching regional projects on marine litter reduction and wastewater management. Indonesia also requested technical and knowledge exchange support from COBSEA and UNEP to enhance

RC3S's capacity. The delegation emphasized ongoing environmental governance and community-based waste management initiatives as foundations for RC3S's contribution to regional goals, calling for continued collaboration among COBSEA participating countries and partners to strengthen marine conservation in the East Asian Seas.

4.2 Regional stakeholder consultation for the Regional Node

The Secretariat introduced the agenda item and provided background on the Regional Node co-hosted by RC3S, highlighting its role in supporting implementation of RAP MALI. The Secretariat invited the Global Partnership on Plastic Pollution and Marine Litter (GPML) team to present the Global Plastics Hub.

Ms. Natalie Harms presented the Global Plastics Hub, highlighting its role in supporting countries through data integration, national dashboards, and progress-tracking tools, and invited feedback to better align the platform with national and regional priorities. Following this, Ms. Nao Takeuchi demonstrated the platform's key features—Knowledge Hub, Data Hub, and Community Hub—and encouraged countries to register and contribute data to enhance its accuracy and usefulness.

Indonesia sought clarification on data sources and updates given the large volume of data. In response, Ms. Harms explained that the dashboards aggregate publicly available global datasets disaggregated at national level and encouraged countries to verify and contribute their own data. Mr. Takeuchi added that efforts are underway to validate data and enhance integration with national information.

The Secretariat further provided an overview of ongoing updates to the COBSEA Regional Node web platform, highlighting its alignment with the Global Plastics Hub and plans to enhance functionality through phased development in collaboration with Akvo. Mr. Martin Christov from Akvo presented a prototype of the updated platform, showcasing proposed features including a knowledge library, categorized case studies, learning center, data hub, and community hub tailored for the East Asian Seas region. Countries were invited to provide written feedback or suggestions for integration into the final version of the platform.

The Secretariat presented the research network and research database under the COBSEA regional node web platform, highlighting its background and current status. Ms. Jin reminded that the regional research database, developed in partnership with the National University of Singapore and funded by the SEA Circular Project, currently provides access to over 700 peer-reviewed publications relevant to marine litter in the East Asian Seas region. The regional research network, launched in 2022 to address knowledge gaps and promote collaborative research, is currently inactive due to the lack of a dedicated lead institution and sustainable resources. The Secretariat invited countries to consider revitalizing and formalizing the network, encouraging prominent universities or research institutions to lead or co-lead the effort, supported by the Secretariat in coordination and resource mobilization.

Singapore responded, noting that its autonomous universities work largely according to national priorities, which may differ from regional needs, and suggested exploring alignment with ongoing international processes such as the INC science-policy panel to avoid duplication. Singapore also

proposed conducting a survey of national universities to map their research priorities against regional agendas. Cambodia expressed support for engaging universities and research centers from participating countries more actively by inviting them to WGML meetings to build a stronger network and facilitate data sharing and collaboration. The Secretariat noted the opportunity to organize informal sessions connecting policymakers and researchers within the WGML framework to strengthen science-policy interface.

4.3 Expert group on Monitoring

Ms. Kumarasamy presented the background of the expert group on monitoring, including its establishment in 2021 and the purpose to support participating countries. The Secretariat opened a discussion on the reactivation of this group. Singapore asked clarification on how nominations were made to the expert group. The Secretariat confirmed that each country nominated one expert, which can either be a part of a relevant government agency or a relevant research organization. It was agreed that the discussion to reactivate the expert group would take place WGML-8 next year.

5. Preparation for the second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2)

5.1 Briefing on INC process by the INC Secretariat

Ms. Jyoti Mathur-Filipp, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) on plastic pollution, provided an update on the process. She highlighted progress made across five negotiation sessions since 2022, with the *Chair's Text* (32 draft articles) forming the basis for further talks. INC-5.2 will be held in Geneva from 5–14 August 2025, preceded by regional consultations on 4 August. Over 3,000 participants are registered, including 834 delegates from 164 members of the committee and over 2,100 observers. Ministerial participation is encouraged (12–14 August), with 60 high-level representatives registered so far; no high-level segment is planned. The INC Secretariat continues to support regional consultations and informal discussions to help bridge differences and finalize the text.

Singapore thanked the INC Secretariat for organizing the recent regional consultation in Bangkok, calling it constructive and useful, and expressed support for the upcoming treaty negotiations at INC-5.2 in August 2025.

5.2 Development of a regional statement to INC-5.2

The Secretariat provided an overview of the process for developing the regional statement to INC-5.2 on behalf of the COBSEA WGML, highlighting that it builds on national inputs, RAP MALI priorities, and earlier regional statements. The Secretariat shared comments received from the Republic of Korea, recommending revision from *technology transfer* to *technology cooperation*, and from Singapore, proposing that the statement remain general without listing specific solutions to ensure flexibility and alignment with UNEA resolution 5/14.

Indonesia acknowledged receipt of the draft regional statement prior to WGML-7. The document has been circulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to other ministries for consultation. Indonesia anticipates submitting its feedback to the Secretariat within one week following the conclusion of WGML-7.

China provided comments, proposing adjustments to the background section to remove reference to WGML as a preparatory meeting for INC, and suggesting edits to the draft text, including adding *practical* alongside *ambitious*, deleting references to *single-use* and *short-lived plastics*, and replacing *eliminate* with *address* to better reflect INC discussions. China indicated it would submit written inputs to the Secretariat.

Following WGML-7, the Secretariat will send out the revised draft of the regional statement to all countries for further review and written feedback. Then, the final version of the statement will be shared again with the WGML by 21 July 2025. Additionally, countries are encouraged to indicate their availability and interest in delivering the statement on behalf of COBSEA WGML to INC-5.2 in Geneva.

6. Regional sharing on plastic pollution action

6.1 Knowledge sharing from relevant initiatives in the region

In this agenda Item, knowledge partners shared their ongoing projects, future plans, and possibilities for collaboration. Ms. Kumarasamy moderated the session and the Q&A.

Ms. Sunwook Hong from Our Sea of East Asia Network (OSEAN) presented the framework for shoreline marine litter monitoring and regional action. The presentation included showcasing how to find the best monitoring strategy using AI tools, how to develop long term evaluation and what type of responses to prevent plastic pollution. Ms. Hong particularly highlighted the OCEAB KNIGHTS Program where monitoring was done through drones, smartphones, and underwater cameras.

Ms. Erin Sinogba from the Asian Development Bank presented on the Framework for Enhancing Environmental Sustainability under Strategy 2030. She highlighted the importance of mobilizing finance, sharing knowledge, and preparing for the global plastics treaty. In the presentation she also re-iterated the importance of the ongoing collaboration with COBSEA.

Ms. Marian Ledsama from Greenpeace Southeast Asia presented the project *Khua sa Thingi*. The project seeks to reduce single-use plastics through reuse and refill systems. The system includes a viable system in community stores to provide consumers with simple, affordable and accessible alternatives to sachets. The project was chosen as one of the best practice case studies knowledge products in the MA-RE-DESIGN project.

Ms Gusung Lee from the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) shared on ongoing activities, highlighting a project in the Philippines and Timor-Leste. The project featured infrastructure demonstrations, beach monitoring, and capacity building.

Ms. Marilyn Mercado from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) presented ongoing activities of the No Plastic in Nature Initiatives across the East Asian Seas. The presentation highlighted a wide-range of resources available to the COBSEA participating countries, including the Global Plastic navigator, which shows the positions and pathways to end plastic pollution.

7. Any other business

No other issues were raised.

8. Next Meeting of the WGML

The Secretariat invited countries' views on arrangements for the 8th meeting of the Working Group on Marine Litter (WGML-8). Ms. Jin proposed holding WGML-8 back-to-back with IGM 27 in 2026, in line with the Terms of Reference providing for at least one meeting per year, typically in association with other COBSEA meetings. The Philippines sought clarification on timing and participants. Countries expressed support for this arrangement, with Viet Nam highlighting the value of in-person meetings and the benefits of organizing the WGML meeting prior to the IGM for preparatory discussions. China agreed to the proposed back-to-back arrangement, supporting in-person participation.

9. Closing of the Meeting

The Secretariat reminded countries that the draft meeting report would be shared with the Working Group focal points for comments within four weeks. The Philippines, as the host country, delivered the closing remarks through Ms. Engr. Maria Dorica Naz-Hipe, Assistant Director of the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). She thanked the Working Group for the productive discussions and successful conclusion of the meeting, and expressed appreciation to all countries, partners—including the Asian Development Bank (ADB)—and the COBSEA Secretariat, emphasizing the importance of collective action and shared learning to address the marine litter and plastic pollution in the East Asian Seas region.

Annex 1: Agenda of the Seventh Meeting of the COBSEA WGML

1. Opening of the Meeting
 - 1.1 Opening remarks and overview of agenda
 - 1.2 Introduction of participants
2. Organization of work
3. Progress against the biennial workplan for implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (RAP MALI) 2025-2026
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4. Update on regional mechanisms for marine litter
 - 4.1 The Regional Capacity Center for Clean Seas (RC3S) as a Regional Activity Centre (RAC)
 - 4.2 Regional stakeholder consultation for the Regional Node
 - 4.3 Expert group on Monitoring
5. Preparation for the second part of the fifth session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5.2)
 - 5.1 Briefing on INC process by the INC Secretariat
 - 5.2 Development of a regional statement to INC-5.2
6. Regional sharing on plastic pollution action
 - 6.1 Knowledge sharing from relevant initiatives in the region
 - 6.2 Upcoming events and opportunities
7. Any other business
8. Next Meeting of the WGML
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