

ASEAN SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME AND COLLABORATION WITH SEAFDEC

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to inform the participants of the Workshop on the existence of an ASEAN regional cooperation programme on sea turtle conservation and protection and that ASEAN has recently forged a collaborative effort with the SEAFDEC in this area.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF COOPERATION

Sea turtles are one of the important protected marine animals under the CITES agreement in the ASEAN region. Most of the ASEAN Member Countries have established national programmes on the conservation and management of sea turtles. However, information on research, conservation and management of these animals in the region are rather fragmented. There is, therefore, a need for a regional approach to coordinate these information and data to provide a clearer picture of the status of the programmes and activities in the ASEAN region.

In most of the ASEAN Member Countries, the coastal shores are important habitats for the turtles living in the tropical seas. Many of these turtles are highly migratory and move from waters of one country to another. Within the region, most of the ASEAN Member Countries have established national or regional conservation programmes to protect these animals. However, some of these programmes are under national jurisdiction and there is a need for greater regional cooperation to coordinate the conservation and management activities and to provide an overall picture of the stocks, breeding behaviour and migratory patterns. There is also a need to look at legislative efforts at a regional level to protect these endangered species.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON ASEAN SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

Recognizing the above facts and to counter the pressure by the US embargo on the import of shrimps from a number of ASEAN Member Countries in early 1997, following the US's accusation that shrimp trawlers of these countries did not use the turtle excluder device (TED), the 19th Meeting of the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF), held in September 1997 in Bangkok, endorsed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on ASEAN Sea Turtle Conservation and Protection. The objectives of the MOU are to promote the protection, conservation, replenishing and recovery of sea turtles and of their habitats based on the best available scientific evidence, taking into account the environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of individual ASEAN Member Countries. The areas of application of the MOU include the land territories and the maritime areas over which the participating ASEAN countries exercise sovereignty, sovereign rights or jurisdiction in accordance with international law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was concluded at Montego Bay, Jamaica on 10 December 1982 and came into force on 16 November 1994.

The MOU lays down the definitions of "sea turtle" and "sea turtle habitats" and the mechanism of cooperation. Considering its long-term experiences and strong efforts on sea turtle conservation,

Malaysia has been designated as the Regional Coordinator to lead a Technical Experts Working Group in the implementation of the MOU. This Group comprises sea turtle and environment experts from participating ASEAN Member Countries and reports directly to the ASEAN Sectoral Working Group on Fisheries (ASWGF_i). The Technical Experts Group, at its meeting in December 1997 in Jakarta, prepared an ASEAN programme and work plan on sea turtle conservation and protection which was approved by the Sixth Meeting of ASWGF_i in March 1998 in Bandar Seri Begawan and endorsed by the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of AMAF and the 20th Meeting of AMAF held in September 1998 in Hanoi.

ASEAN-SEAFDEC COLLABORATION

It is also stipulated in the MOU that ASEAN Member Countries recognize the SEAFDEC as the competent technical regional organization on marine issues in the ASEAN region and agree to seek close cooperation and collaboration with SEAFDEC in undertaking its sea turtle conservation and protection programme. As a matter of fact, the ASEAN Sea Turtle Conservation and Protection Programme and Work Plan mentioned earlier was prepared with full cooperation and contribution of the SEAFDEC's Marine Fishery Resource Development and Management Department (MFRDMD) in Kuala Terengganu, Malaysia.

In line with the above recognition of SEAFDEC's competence in marine resources research and development, the SOM-AMAF and the 20th Meeting of AMAF endorsed a proposal by the ASWGF_i to forge a collaborative programme with SEAFDEC in the area of sustainable management of fishery resources in the Southeast Asian region. Upon acceptance of the proposed collaboration by the SEAFDEC Council, an ASEAN-SEAFDEC Fisheries Consultative Group (FCG) was established to formulate joint cooperation projects between the two regional bodies.

ASEAN-SEAFDEC PROJECT ON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF SEA TURTLES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

At its first meeting on 4 March 1999 in Bangkok, the FCG agreed on a number of project proposals, including one on "Conservation and Management of Sea Turtles in Southeast Asian Countries". This project proposal, together with the others, was later approved by the 31st Meeting of SEAFDEC Council and by the ASWGF_i and the SOM-AMAF.

Objectives

The objectives of the Project are: (i) to coordinate and compile information on the status of research, conservation and management activities on sea turtles in ASEAN countries and (ii) to establish a mechanism for regional collaboration in research for sea turtle conservation and management.

Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of the Project are: (i) an ASEAN-SEAFDEC publication on the status and results of research and conservation programmes in sea turtles in ASEAN and (ii) an ASEAN-SEAFDEC network of national institutes involved in research on sea turtles.

Activities

The activities to achieve these objectives and outputs will be:

- i. nomination of one country coordinator by each ASEAN Member Country for the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Sea Turtle Research Network;

- ii. Organization of workshops to establish a format for collecting information and data in each ASEAN country;
- iii. Compilation of information into an ASEAN-SEAFDEC publication on sea turtles management and conservation in ASEAN; and
- iv. Formulation of regional projects by ASEAN-SEAFDEC Network Coordinators. The Network will also be a forum for exchange of information on national programmes and priorities on sea turtle research.

Mechanism for Project Implementation

Malaysia and SEAFDEC MFRDMD will serve as contact points for the Project for ASEAN and SEAFDEC, respectively.

On the ASEAN side, Malaysia, as the ASEAN lead country for this project will organize inputs from the ASEAN Member Countries. ASEAN countries will contribute information, expertise and facilities available in the national fisheries research institutes involved in sea turtle management and conservation. Each ASEAN country through their country coordinators will undertake the following:

- i. collect and compile information on national activities on sea turtle research and conservation;
- ii. participate in workshops/seminars for formulation of regional research programmes; and
- iii. conduct research based on regional projects as proposed under the ASEAN-SEAFDEC Sea Turtle Research Network.

On the SEAFDEC side, MFRDMD serves as the SEAFDEC Lead Department for this collaboration project with ASEAN and will, in collaboration with the ASEAN country coordinators, organize workshops, seminars for the compilation of data for the publication and for formulation of regional research activities. MFRDMD already have similar activities for SEAFDEC Member Countries and will incorporate its existing programmes into this collaborative project.

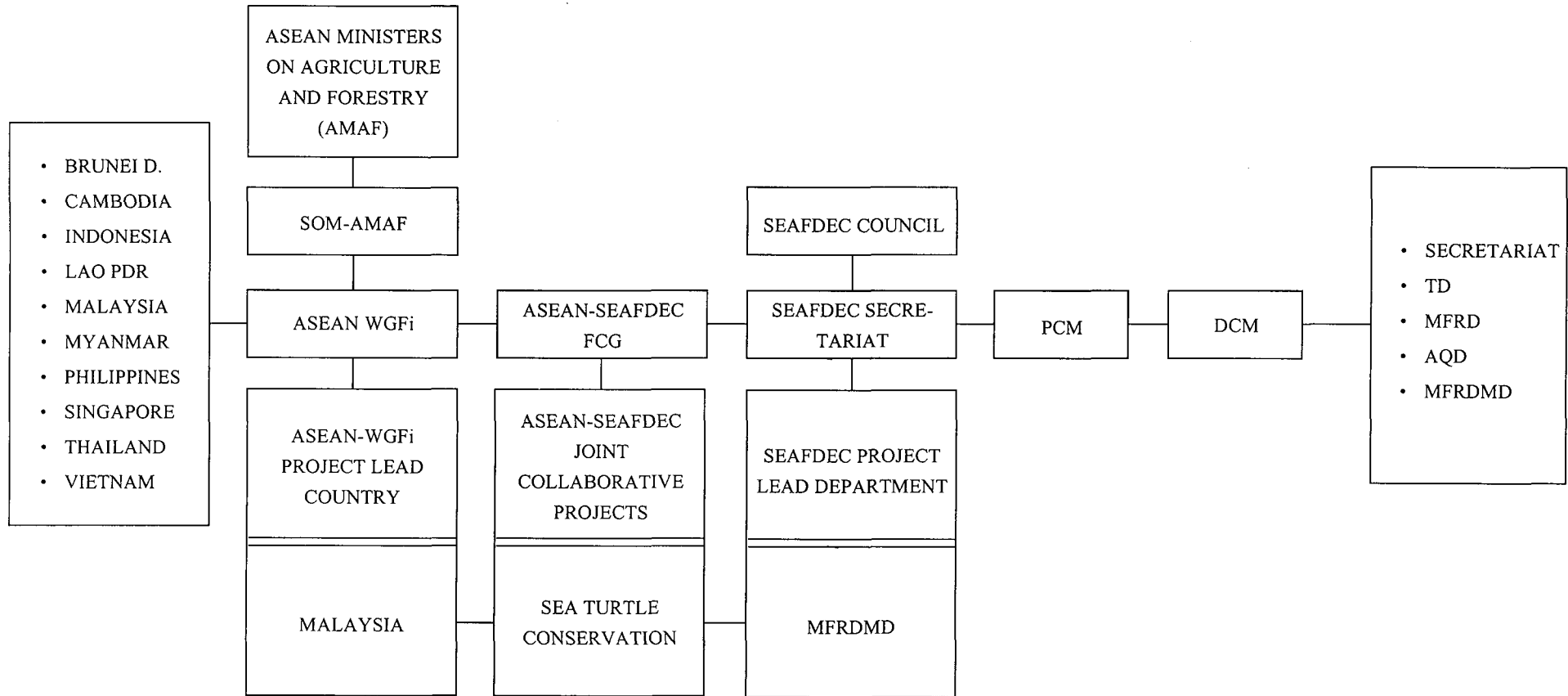
MFRDMD will provide expertise (local or Japanese) to assist/advice on national/ regional programmes on sea turtle research and conservation.

Reporting

Malaysia and MFRDMD will jointly report to the ASEAN-SEAFDEC FCG the progress of the Project. In ASEAN, Malaysia will report to the ASEAN WGF and subsequently to the Annual Meeting of the ASEAN Minister of Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF), through SOM-AMAF. In SEAFDEC, MFRDMD will report to the SEAFDEC Council through the SEAFDEC Secretariat and seek guidance of the SEAFDEC Council if necessary.

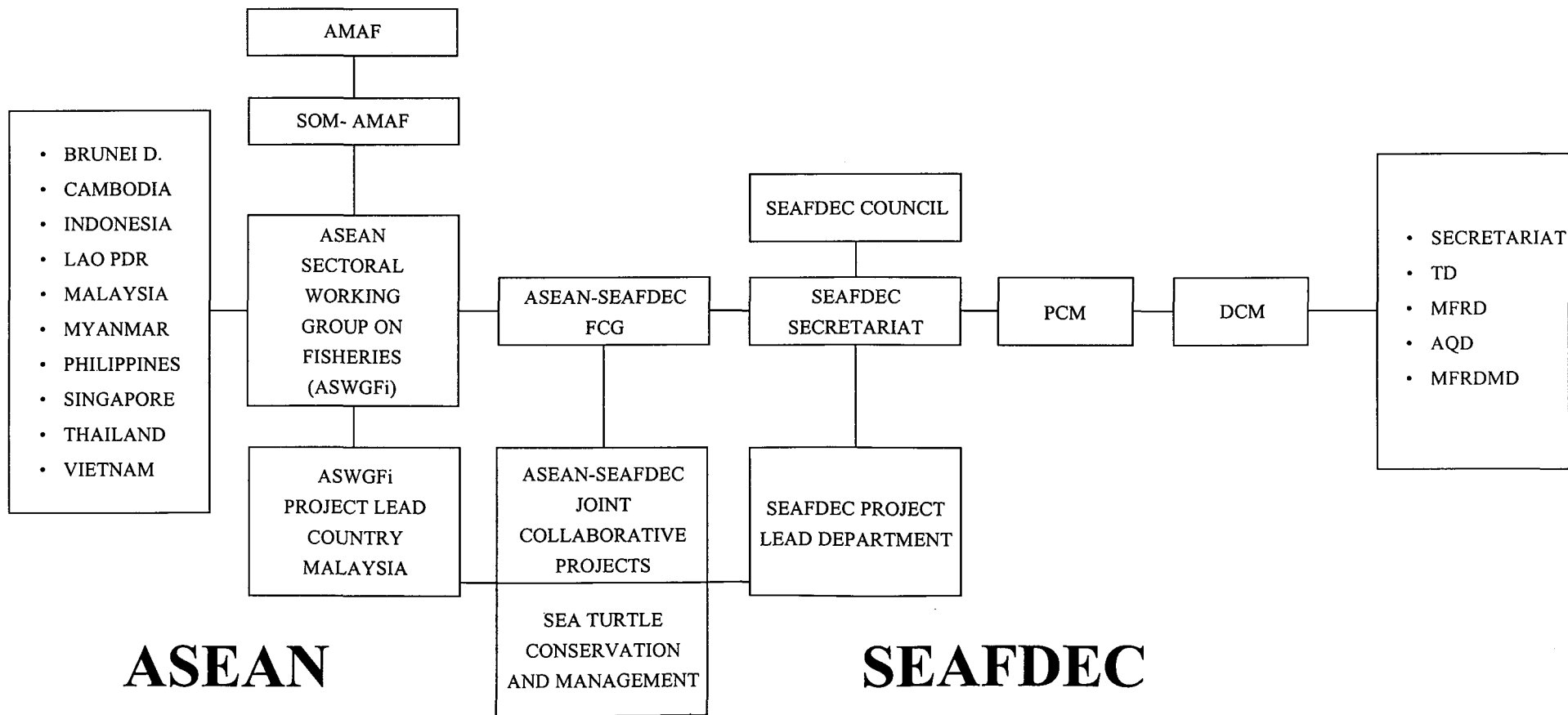
The structure for the mechanism of collaboration is as annexed.

**MECHANISM FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF ASEAN-SEAFDEC
COLLABORATIVE PROJECT ON SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT**



**ASEAN-SEAFDEC PROJECT ON CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT
OF SEA TURTLES IN SOUTHEAST ASIAN/ASEAN COUNTRIES**

Implementation Mechanism



MOU AN ASEAN SEA TURTLE CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION

Signed by:

ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) on 19 September 1997 in Bangkok

Objectives:

“To promote protection, conservation, replenishing and recovery of sea turtles and their habitats based on the best available scientific evidence, taking into account the environmental, socio-economic and cultural characteristics of individual ASEAN member countries”.

Core Provisions:

Definitions of “Sea Turtles” and “Sea Turtle Habitats” as well as the mechanism of cooperation in sea turtle conservation and protection.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE OF COOPERATION

- Sea turtles are protected marine animals under CITES agreement.
- There exist significant populations of sea turtles and their habitats in ASEAN waters.
- Many of these turtle species are highly migratory and move from waters of one country to another.
- Many ASEAN member countries have established national sea turtle conservation and management programmes, but information on these and their research activities are rather fragmented.
- Some of these national programmes are under national jurisdiction and there is a need for greater cooperation to coordinate these activities and to forge regional legislative efforts to protect these endangered species.

DEFINITIONS

SEA Turtles:

- Leatherback Turtle (*Dermochelys coriacea*)
- Green Turtle (*Chelonia mydas*)
- Hawksbill Turtle (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)
- Olive/Pacific Ridley (*Lepidochelys olivacea*)
- Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*)
- Flatback (*Natator dperessa*)

Sea Turtle Habitats:

All aquatic and terrestrial environments where sea turtles live at any stage of their life-cycle.