

# The East Asian Seas UNEP Regional Seas Programme

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Received: 8 November 2005 / Accepted: 24 August 2006 /

Published online: 4 October 2006

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**Abstract** In East Asia, the Action Plan of the Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) aims to protect the marine and coastal environment. COBSEA is funded by member countries and UNEP, member countries discuss common problems and resolve and diagnose cross-boundary degradation of marine environments. Success has come from funding for coral reef community activities and the Global Environment Facility funds for the South China Sea Project. COBSEA is actively engaged in the Global Plan of Action for Land-based sources of pollution and the Swedish Government is funding a programme to integrate marine and coastal activities in East Asian Seas. COBSEA is not always successful because of lack of member countries' commitment and understanding of marine and coastal degradation by the wider community. COBSEA could easily combine with other agencies or have closer ties with them. It is suggested that the COBSEA member countries decide on a code of practice for donors and the responsibilities of funding recipients.

**Keywords** COBSEA · UNEP · Management · Regional Seas Programme

## Abbreviations

COBSEA	Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia
ASEAN	The Association of South East Asian Nations
EAS/RCU	The East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit
EU	The European Union
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GESAMP	Joint Group of Experts on the Scientific Aspects of Marine Environmental Protection
GPA	Global Programme of Action for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities

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ICRAN	International Coral Reef Action Network
ICRI	International Coral Reef Initiative
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IOC	Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission
MPAs	marine protected areas
NGOs	non-governmental organisations
PEMSEA	Regional Programme on Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia
SIDA	Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WESTPAC	IOC Sub-commission for the Western Pacific

## 1 Introduction

East Asian Seas are in need of sound, integrated management to resume sustainable use of marine and coastal resources, to preserve remaining resources and to restore damaged and lost marine habitats. More than 70% of the population of South East Asia lives in the coastal zone, and most depend upon the coastal environment for food (UNEP, 1996). The population in coastal regions is increasing due to migration and increasing birth rates. Serious destruction of coral reefs, seagrass beds and mangrove forests has occurred (Talaue-McManus, 2000). Fishery resources are over exploited and pollution and the runoff from rural and urban development are destroying all other marine resources. Rapid economic development over the past 20 years has not always been carried out mindful of the need to preserve marine environments. Economic recovery is occurring but development appears to come at a cost to the environment.

## 2 About the East Asian Seas, UNEP Regional Seas Programme

### 2.1 What is the Regional Seas Programme?

There are 13 regional Action Plans under the global UNEP Regional Seas Programme. The Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans can be used to append other multilateral environmental agreements and global programmes and initiatives. The Conventions and Action Plans are also encouraged to form horizontal ties among the Regional Seas Programmes and partner programmes and strengthen their cooperation with international organisations and make new partnerships. The Regional Seas Programmes differ greatly, some are conventions, e.g. Kuwait Convention (1978) for the Regional Organisation for the Protection of the Marine Environment, Cartagena Convention (1983) for the Caribbean Environment Programme, some have developed countries as members, e.g., Mediterranean Action Plan while others, such as the South Asian Seas Programme, struggle to find funding. The Regional Seas Programmes cover issues that are politically, socially

and biologically diverse (UNEP, 2006). Problems in temperate and sub-arctic regions are different from those in tropical regions. Member countries are at different levels of economic and social development. Member countries differ politically and culturally so that an integrated or coordinated action may not always be acceptable. For these reasons, in many cases, the action plans are vastly different.

The Global Programme of Action (GPA) for the Protection of the Marine Environment from Land-based Activities plays an active role in the Coordinating Body of the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA) Action Plan. A monitoring programme for collecting data on land-based activities and their impact on the coastal and marine environment is underway (UNEP, 2006). Member countries of COBSEA have endorsed a regional programme of action for the protection of the marine environment of the East Asian Seas from the effects of land-based activities. It is interesting to note that the GPA programme and the Regional Seas programmes come under the same director and that COBSEA member countries have no legally binding regional agreement for these programmes (UNEP/GPA, 2000; UNEP, 2005).

The COBSEA Action Plan, through its secretariat, the East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit (EAS/RCU), is actively engaged in many activities in the region. In a broad sense this Action Plan carries out activities under the Conventions on Biological Diversity (CBD) 1992, Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) 1979, Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) 1973, the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 1992, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982 and many others. It also follows Chapter 17 of Agenda 21 of the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the GPA adopted by 109 countries and the EU, in Washington in 1995. Although supposedly committed to the COBSEA Action Plan, Australia has not set a good example to COBSEA members by not ratifying the Kyoto Protocol whereas Thailand has not ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The East Asian Seas Action Plan was revised by regional experts in 1998 and a Long-term Plan was endorsed by the COBSEA in 2000 (UNEP, 2000a). This Long-term Plan contains pragmatic activities that could take place over the next 10 years, if funding is found. A Plan of Action for land-based sources of pollution under the GPA was prepared, endorsed by COBSEA and is now in operation (UNEP/GPA, 2000).

That the East Asian Seas Action Plan is not in the form of a convention, similar to some other regional seas programmes, is a source of conflict between UNEP and the COBSEA member countries. UNEP is fully committed to promoting negotiations leading to a convention between member countries. Yet the countries will not even allow the word “convention” to be used in deliberations on this subject and prefer the term “legal framework”. According to the countries, a convention will not be workable and forces an agreement to which they are not fully committed.

## 2.2 Who is in it?

COBSEA was originally formed by agreement of five countries through the ASEAN secretariat in 1981. The five countries were Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Then in 1994 five more countries became members—Australia, Cambodia, China, South Korea and Viet Nam.

The term “East Asian Seas”, according to COBSEA, refers to the seas bounded by southern China, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and the Philippines. Other organisations, for example the office of the joint GEF/UNDP/IMO Regional Programme on Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA, 2003) defines the “Seas of East Asia” as Bohai Sea, Yellow Sea, East China Sea, South China Sea including Sulu-Sulawesi and Indonesian Seas. ASEAN member countries are Cambodia, China, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam and the seas surrounding these countries are considered as East Asian Seas.

Of the ten COBSEA member countries, seven require aid to facilitate or develop existing marine management policies and strategy. Of these seven, only China is not a member of ASEAN. Australia, Singapore and South Korea are possibly in COBSEA to further their political profiles in the region. No activities supported by COBSEA exist in these three countries and they are not eligible for Global Environment Facility funding. Little funding was provided by these countries direct to COBSEA from 1998 to 2005. However, they sent experts to thematic meetings and their experts were available for advice.

### 2.3 Funding and budget

Each member provides contributions into the East Asian Seas Trust Fund on a voluntary basis, determined by that country. In 2005 the sum of these pledges (US\$171,000/annum) did not cover the costs of the EAS/RCU (US\$800,000/annum) Furthermore, current arrears of contribution to the Trust Fund amount to over \$US220,000 (UNEP, 2006). The UNEP, through the Environment Fund, covered this difference since 1981 but threatened to greatly reduce or remove this financial assistance for 2003. Since then the balance has come from accumulated funds and the Environment Fund which, for 2006, provided US\$100,000. Accumulated savings, amounting to just over \$US1 million, would have only allowed for another 3 years operation at the staffing levels in operation then.

UNEP's support during the years from 1981 to 2001 amounted to US\$4.3 million whereas the total from pledges from member countries was US\$1.8 million. Some of the countries of South East Asia have not yet recovered from the economic downturn of 1997 and many have not prioritised environmental sustainability high enough to increase their pledges to COBSEA. The viability of COBSEA in the long-term is unknown as no member country, by the beginning of 2006, has agreed to increase its contribution (UNEP, 2006). Some countries were in arrears of pledges.

Each year a budget is prepared and endorsed by COBSEA member countries (Table 1). From the Trust Fund in 2006–2007, US\$700,000 covered staff, office rent and office expenses. This over-inflated amount includes a contingency fund for each staff member to cover repatriation, cost to bring in new staff and staff expenses. Although change of staff is not carried out each year this amount is budgeted for annually, much to the consternation of COBSEA members (Table 1). There was no budget printed in the Report of the Fifteenth Meeting of COBSEA on the East Asian Seas Action Plan (UNEP, 2000). In 2006 the UNEP Environment Fund provided US\$80,000 which was used to cover meetings and office equipment, printing, and communication and a further US\$20,000 for staff travel. The GPA projects were provided with US\$50,000 from the GPA (Table 2) while ICRAN

**Table 1** COBSEA Budgets from the Last Three COBSEA Meetings (2001, 2004, 2006)

	16th COBSEA		17th COBSEA		18th COBSEA	
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006–2007
Project Staff <sup>a</sup>	290,000	290,000	290,000	252,000	254,000	490,000
Admin Staff	139,000	149,000	149,000	136,000	121,000	172,000
Travel	35,000	21,000	21,000	28,500	27,500	53,000
Consultants	10,000	8,000	8,000	81,300	59,400	13,000
Sub-contracts	30,000	18,000	20,000	205,000	199,200	200,000
Training	10,000	26,000	26,000	96,000	5,000	43,850
Meetings	10,000	19,000	19,000	98,500	127,500	205,000
Admin, rent, equipment	78,464	46,000	49,500	60,352	68,832	65,951
Total	602,464	577,000	577,000	957,652	862,432	1,242,801

Allotments for years 2001–2002, 2004–2005 and 2006–2007 all in US Dollars

<sup>a</sup> This allotment includes an allowance of \$59,500 to cover *inter alia* the costs of pension contributions, repatriation, re-advertisement, re-appointment and establishment grants for replacement staff together with the administrative costs associated with personnel support including payroll

provided US\$33,000 for coral reef projects (Table 2). SIDA's contribution has increased from previous years and stands at US\$ 306,000 for the 2 years 2006 and 2007 (Table 2). This goes towards support for a senior consultant, more staff travel (US\$ 25,000), assistance to countries (US\$ 150,000) and meetings (US\$ 107,000) for the 2 years 2006 and 2007 (UNEP, 2006).

#### 2.4 What does the East Asian Seas UNEP Regional Seas Programme do?

The activities of the EAS/RCU, to comply with its mandate include:

Preparing new project proposals for possible donors to increase capacity, public awareness and data acquisition useful to conserving the marine environment. Servicing current projects (ICRAN, ICRI and GPA activities) (UNEP, 2002a, b, 2003). Encouraging COBSEA member countries to increase their Trust Fund pledges and to belong to a regional network of countries in which to share experience, expertise, capacity building and collaboration and whose aim is to conserve, manage and restore natural marine resources (UNEP, 2001a, 2004, 2006). Finding contributions from donors for support of the COBSEA secretariat (Table 2) (UNEP, 2001a, Annex IV). Carrying out reporting and oversight activities for UNEP Division of Environmental Conventions. Managing and overseeing the

**Table 2** Donors to the East Asian Seas Trust Fund, included in budgets in Table 1

	17th COBSEA		18th COBSEA
	2004	2005	2006–2007
ICRAN	193,650	187,450	33,373
SIDA	114,658	125,082	306,298
GPA hotspots	119,400	94,000	50,350
Coral reef monitoring	95,444	50,000	52,780
Total	523,152	456,532	442,801

All in US Dollars

N.B. Data from the 16th COBSEA is not available from UNEP (UNEP, 2001a)

activities of the COBSEA secretariat. Liaising with other marine environment agencies and organisations including governments (UNEP, 2004, Annex III). For seven of the ten countries, collaborating and participating in the UNEP/GEF Project “Reducing Environmental Degradation Trends in the South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand”, shortened to “UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project” in this paper (UNEP, 2000b). Familiarising member countries with transboundary issues relevant to the marine and coastal environment.

## 2.5 What are the East Asian Seas UNEP Regional Seas Programme’s successes?

The East Asian Seas Regional Seas Programme is supposed to be the leading UN agency dealing with marine environmental issues in the East Asian Seas (K. Töefer, Pers. Comm. 1999). It has coordinated marine and coastal environmental activities in East Asian seas, bringing together agencies, NGOs and government departments to tackle marine environment issues. Recently, COBSEA received SIDA funding to support the East Asian Seas Action Plan by enhancing co-ordination and sustainability of the Plan (UNEP, 2004). Fund raising through donor countries and GEF was successful. The EAS/RCU obtained GEF funding for the US\$32 million UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project. This Project is unique in its management framework and it is the first multilateral agreement in the South China Sea that China has signed (UNEP/GEF, 2000). Other active fund-raising through foundations and industry for East Asian Seas Action Plan activities was successful.

Activities carried out through the GPA include developing regional guidelines and criteria for GPA activities such as defining hotspots of pollution and sewage for specific action later (UNEP, 2002a). The land-based sources and activities affecting the marine environment in the East Asian Seas were identified so that a work plan could be followed to facilitate the GPA and the achievement of all its goals at the regional and national levels (Chia and Kirkman, 2000).

Coral reefs are an important component of East Asian Seas and successful activities were carried out through ICRAN, e.g., funding local communities to protect MPAs containing corals and funding monitoring by teaching local people the monitoring methods of the international community-based monitoring protocol “Reef Check” and initiating monitoring of coral reefs to determine their health and facilitate management (UNEP, 2000c). Other activities were carried out through ICRI. This included preparing and funding reports on the state of corals in the region for the biannual “Status of Coral Reefs of the World” (Wilkinson, 2000, 2002).

The EAS/RCU actively participates in regional conferences and symposia and is considered an expert on many marine and coastal issues in the Region. A more scientific approach was taken by COBSEA since 1998, returning to its original mandate of the eighties. As an example of COBSEA’s involvement with the scientific community of the Region it hosted an international symposium on protection and management of coastal marine ecosystems and a staff member presented a paper on regional coordination in protection and management of coastal marine ecosystems (UNEP, 2001b).

The EAS/RCU found funding for small projects in the member countries relating to coral reefs, MPAs and capacity building for coral reef resource management (COBSEA 2001).

The EAS/RCU is strengthening the Governments' capability to manage marine and coastal environments, including training, developing a meta-database and capabilities to assess environmental risk and socio-economic impact evaluation (UNEP, 2006).

At the end of 2002, an initiative to better co-ordinate marine and coastal environmental activities and to reduce duplication of projects in the East Asian Seas was presented to SIDA and in early 2003 it was funded. An easily accessible central online database and metadata base will allow countries to identify their needs and to address gaps and areas not covered by existing activities. These gaps include areas related to global conventions to which they are signatories. This increase in national capacity and access to information will prepare countries to participate in regional agreements to protect the marine environment. The project will allow managers to make informed decisions on the protection of marine resources and inform a wide range of the population on activities, projects and programmes that are proposed, underway or achieved in marine and coastal protection (UNEP, 2004). It will provide a central point where all aid programmes are integrated, reducing duplication. Countries' focal points and aid agencies should be responsible for this database.

SIDA's commitment to this project can be seen by the budget item of \$US 306,000 set aside for 2006 and 2007 (UNEP, 2006).

## 2.6 What are the East Asian Seas UNEP Regional Seas Programme's failures?

In the words of GESAMP (2001), "*Governments as a whole are not putting their money where their mouths are, and the relatively low level of engagement in these issues by the public and other stakeholders has done nothing to counter their lack of resolve.*" In defense of developing countries, the report goes on to explain how these countries "*are hamstrung by a critical lack of the financial, human and institutional resources they need to address environmental problems effectively*".

At each annual COBSEA meeting, the member countries are supposed to be represented at the ministerial level or by officials at a level high enough to make decisions for their country. Member countries receive an annotated agenda to COBSEA meetings 6 weeks in advance of the meeting. This UN regulation aims to ensure that member countries know and understand all matters that are to be discussed at the meeting. Agreement is by consensus. In fact, countries were in my experience of five tears not prepared for COBSEA meetings, even though they always received agenda items 6 weeks ahead of meetings. Neither were the participants at a high enough governmental level or authorised to make decisions for their country (see Participants list in UNEP (2000b); UNEP (2001a); UNEP (2004)).<sup>1</sup>In 2004, Australia, South Korea and Viet Nam were not represented and of the other seven only one participant returned for the 2006 COBSEA Meeting (UNEP, 2004;

<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the level of participants were: Assistant Director, International Marine Department; Deputy Director General; Assistant Deputy Minister in Charge of Marine and Coastal Degradation Control; Researcher; Director, Water and Marine Division; Assistant Director, Environmental Management Bureau; State Counsel, International Affairs Division; Deputy Permanent Secretary and Head of Integrated Coastal Zone (UNEP, 2006).



UNEP, 2006). Decisions and actions from member countries were not timely and, as mentioned above, poor or no preparation for the decision making COBSEA meetings often resulted in long periods of inactivity for the secretariat. Examples of this include taking 2 years for the Long-term Plan to be ratified (UNEP, 2000b) and, in the case of the GEF funding proposal, which required the signatures of all focal points of all eligible countries, 2 years in negotiation, after nearly 3 years of preparation (UNEP, 2000b). The lack of understanding of the regional problems in the East Asian Seas and of COBSEA activities is compounded by not having participants of the COBSEA meeting with a continuing interest in COBSEA. Their career positions change within their government departments and the historical knowledge and personal contact is lost.

Not only is individual member country support for the EAS/RCU inadequate but poor teamwork between countries manifests itself with no real effort to remedy transboundary environmental problems. This may be corrected by the UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project and the recently initiated SIDA project (explained earlier). There is a lack of recognition of the capabilities of the EAS/RCU as the secretariat for COBSEA as a means to manage and facilitate conservation of the environment in East Asian Seas. This is compounded by poor funding opportunities and poor support from well-off members of COBSEA, (see UNEP, 2000b, 2001a, 2004). There is a number of agencies working with the same aims and yet competing for funding in East Asian Seas, e.g. PEMSEA, ASEAN, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), IOC/WESTPAC.

Donor countries are giving aid and employing locals at greater salaries than their governments can pay, therefore the people most qualified for solving their countries' environmental problems are going to aid agencies and international organisations and leaving their government positions. During my tenure heading the secretariat of COBSEA, I observed aid agencies offering aid for a demonstration project for which the developing country may be already receiving funds from another donor.

In the paragraph below, the comments are from personal experience and observations as the Coordinator of the East Asian Seas Regional Coordinating Unit.

UNEP headquarters in Nairobi offers poor leadership and has little interest in the regional activities apart from desiring a legally binding regional agreement. As stated earlier, UNEP is interested in having countries participate in legally binding agreements and conventions. It is a bureaucracy which breeds administrative laziness and a lack of responsibility for actions. UNEP headquarters has many internal disputes which may influence the ability of the Regional Seas Programmes to be well accepted in their relevant regions. UNEP culture needs to change by setting values and a clear mission statement. There is an intrinsic problem within UNEP where some managers are more interested in personal power than following a clearly outlined mission. Loyalty to the organization is often lacking and personal security of tenure seems to be the main objective. Personal interests should not come before corporate vision.

Of major concern during the past 10 years has been that there are too many generic, generalised goals, aims and objectives in all regional international programmes including that of COBSEA. There are not enough pragmatic, temporally and spatially planned activities to manage the marine environment. For example, the Long-term Strategy of COBSEA (1994–2009) presented at the Fifth Meeting of the Experts on the East Asian Seas Action Plan (UNEP(OCA)/EAS. WG.5/5) requires a pragmatic approach to give tangible results to achieve the objectives of the Action



Plan; COBSEA rectified this by producing its long-term plan (UNEP, 2000). The PEMSEA document “Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia” is another generic statement on vague plans to manage the coastal environment (PEMSEA, 2002). This opinion was also expressed by the environmental editor of the Bangkok Post (Bangkok Post, 2003).

### 3 The way forward

Long-term pragmatic plans with outputs and outcomes set within timeframes are what are required. These plans must be integrated with those of other international organisations with similar objectives, such as ASEAN and PEMSEA. The UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project was designed to encourage cooperation and integration within each participating country and to foster teamwork and cooperation between countries. All countries agreed on the location of demonstration sites, and activities therein will be of benefit to each country. Committees were established in each country for each of the South China Sea environmental components so that all activities of the project and other activities could be integrated through these committees. That this national integration is working has yet to be proven.

Some code of conduct for donors should be developed and agreed upon by COBSEA member countries along the lines of avoiding duplication, identifying priorities, regular checks and performance criteria being set in place. Donors should avoid situations where valuable national scientists and managers are taken from their current national jobs and put into regional or NGO positions. Younger, potentially valuable and knowledgeable staff should be encouraged to develop careers in managing marine resources and remain in their positions so that some continuance of tenure is attained.

A similar code of conduct for the national recipients of aid should be agreed upon by the member countries. They should agree to transparency in how funds are spent, what is being funded and how priorities for national actions are arrived at. They should attempt to train and educate participants in their programmes and agree on reporting on performance throughout the life of the programme.

To improve the effectiveness of COBSEA, more projects to help communities understand the implications of poor environmental policy, stewardship and management should be initiated. The institutional resources required are stronger government departments with the desire to enforce environmental laws at corporate and community level. More education within institutions responsible for national planning and environmental policy-making is required. Aid agencies and governments should offer more for environmental restoration and enforcement while funding for school curricula to cover environmental issues should be made available. Enforcement would be of minor importance if community members are correctly informed and educated on the marine environment and sustainably managing its resources. Activities like this can be carried out by non-governmental and regional organizations and government departments. However, if these activities do not fall within the COBSEA Action Plan its redirection must be endorsed by COBSEA members.

### 3.1 Human behaviour and leadership

A change of culture for UNEP with a clear corporate mission statement and dedicated staff is needed. The programmes should be considered as businesses with shareholders and customers. As a business aims to maximise profits for its partners or shareholders in return for goods and services, so the aim of UNEP should be to maximise environmental conservation and sustainable development for its member countries in return for good science, technical assistance and commitment. As a business, the staff is the most valuable resource and therefore must be used to maximise returns. Representatives of the relevant departments of member countries (focal points) and UNEP staff are the partners and directors and should be working toward the same aim as the business. UNEP staff and the partners need to understand there is a need for dedication, service and commitment similar to those of staff in a successful business.

To make the best use of limited funding, more modest meeting venues should be used where possible and frequent-flyer points should accumulate for use by staff members for UN business. *Per diems* should be paid on expenses not as a lump sum based on the costs of a top hotel in each country. Of course security and comfort for participants of meetings and workshops must be taken into consideration.

### 3.2 Partnerships and reorganisation of the Programme

Integration, transparency and sharing should be the basis of aid to the Regional Seas Programme. The new UNEP/SIDA initiative (described earlier in UNEP, 2004) is an excellent start to reorganizing and changing the direction and role of the EAS/RCU as the secretariat for COBSEA. The UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project was designed to encourage cooperation and integration within each participating country and to foster teamwork and cooperation between countries. More commitment to work in a closer partnership with the EAS/RCU from member countries, and not a “we/they” situation is required. Recognition, commitment and funding from developed member countries (Australia, Korea, Singapore) are essential.

Partnerships with other programmes and agencies with the same or similar goals, such as PEMSEA, ASEAN environment programme, and the EU Programme in Thailand and Philippines, should be investigated. A White Paper was submitted to the 18th COBSEA Meeting (UNEP, 2006, Annex III) but was not endorsed by member countries. It sought to change the EAS/RCU to a COBSEA Secretariat (which it is, so this is a name change only), change from a project-oriented to a policy-oriented approach and change to a decentralized approach rather than a centralized one. The White Paper does not go far enough in demonstrating how such partnerships and integration can be accomplished (UNEP, 2006). Some adjustment may need to be made for membership of COBSEA but this hurdle is not insurmountable. Finally, it is suggested that more commitment by member countries would assist greatly in conserving the marine environment and sustaining its resources.

## 4 Conclusion

The East Asian Seas Regional Programme could be improved. It has a strong potential to conserve and improve marine and coastal environments in the future, but changes are needed. The UNEP/GEF South China Sea Project and the SIDA funded initiative will greatly enhance the credibility and usefulness of COBSEA if their long-term plans are fulfilled. Integration between projects and close links with other coastal programmes through coordination and cooperation will ensure that COBSEA serves a useful purpose in the Region. There should be more emphasis on education at all community levels. More funds and commitment from member countries and more support from developed member countries to implement COBSEA objectives are essential for the Regional Seas Programme to work.

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