

# BOBLME NEWSLETTER

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project



*Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Thailand are collaborating through the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project to better the lives of their coastal populations by improving regional management of the Bay of Bengal environment and its fisheries.*



BANGLADESH



INDIA



INDONESIA



MALAYSIA

## WHAT IS IN THIS ISSUE?



MALDIVES



MYANMAR



SRI LANKA



THAILAND

Welcome to the BOBLME newsletter

TDA released for national consultations

RCU's new office in Phuket

Second annual meeting of the PSC

The year in review: 2010 highlights

World Seagrass Conference

The richness of the Gulf of Mannar

New website to be launched for 2011

BOBLME RCU personnel

## First Newsletter!

Welcome to the BOBLME Project's first quarterly newsletter. The Bay of Bengal today supports a coastal population of over 500 million people in eight nations. The countries themselves harbor nearly one quarter of the world's population. The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (or LME) is one of 64 such LMEs designated worldwide, and one of great importance as its waters are a vital shared resource for each nation. This Project is aimed at assisting the eight countries sharing the Bay in developing a collaborative framework to work together towards a common goal: a healthy ecosystem and sustainability of living resources for the benefit of the coastal populations.

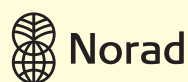
A key objective is to facilitate the engagement of each country in fostering collaboration of resource managers, policy makers and scientists with the intention of harmonizing their national management strategies into a regional strategic action programme.



The stakeholders participating in the Project are working across a wide range of disciplines, including the socio-economic factors of each country, current governance and policies, coastal management approaches, ecology and biodiversity, oceanography and climate change. This is a challenging task considering the project is being carried out in eight countries and covers 6.2 million square kilometers of ocean.

The BOBLME Project is providing guidance, coordination and financial support, as inputs to the process of setting up and implementing this framework of regional co-operation. As one of 20 similar LME projects worldwide, it also facilitates the sharing of research, best practices and lessons

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learned from other international LME projects. The Project is also providing training, and opportunities for basic research and information gathering within each of the countries involved. In these ways the BOBLME Project is helping the eight countries accelerate and enhance their capacity to work together.

The Project has a long term focus which anticipates an ever evolving series of beneficial outcomes for each of the eight nations and the Bay of Bengal LME as a whole. The goal of improved regional management for the Bay is tied to the improvement of the fisheries regulatory bodies, the health of fish stocks, the livelihoods of millions of people, and ultimately the economic, environmental, and social well-being of the region.

The BOBLME Project is gaining momentum, and 2010 was a productive year. Regional and National Inception

workshops have taken place, and the eight countries have engaged in a wide variety of activities which have produced many valuable inputs to the Project. The Regional Coordination Unit has been extremely busy in managing a full complement of meetings, trainings, workshops, and studies. The Project achieved its major milestones and met the ambitious set of targets in 2010.

The National Coordinators for each country have just met to develop a comprehensive programme of work for 2011, and the Project's Steering Committee will meet again soon to review the Project's progress, and endorse a new work plan for 2011.

"This newsletter is intended as one tool in a series of tools to disseminate information on the BOBLME Project to a wide audience of stakeholders. We hope to produce it three times per year.

Each newsletter will log the significant events and activities that took place since the previous issue was released. For more up-to-date news,

the home page of the BOBLME project website will be updated continuously with the latest reports on project activities and related news.

Like all of the BOBLME efforts, we welcome feedback on the newsletter and website, and eagerly await contributions to the content from all of the countries and partner institutions. We hope you enjoy browsing through this issue and look forward to your comments."



*Dr. Chris O'Brien  
Regional Coordinator of the  
BOBLME Project*

## TDA released for National Consultations

### **The TDA has been updated to include new issues, and is now entering the next phase of development**

Countries bordering a Large Marine Ecosystem (LME) prepare a transboundary diagnostic analysis (TDA) that ranks coastal resource issues, identifies and prioritises transboundary problems, analyses socioeconomic impacts, outlines root causes and advances possible remedies. The TDA is a document that serves an important purpose. It doesn't provide solutions but instead highlights important issues and problems that affect the social and economic well-being of eight nations and the health and sustainability of marine resources that provide jobs, minerals, medicines, and food to hundreds of millions of people living along the shores of the Bay.

Teams of national experts and a wide range of stakeholders from all eight countries surrounding the Bay of Bengal will contribute to the TDA process by reviewing and commenting on the updated TDA in order to finalize the document and prepare it for adoption.

This process begins with the selection of a National Facilitator in each of the Project countries. The National Facilitator is responsible for identifying and reaching out to a wide range of national stakeholders, and for implementing a process of review and commentary on the document's contents. In preparation, each country has created a 'roadmap' of

the process required for national consultation and adoption. While the roadmap is different for each country, they all aim to provide an open, transparent, and inclusive process for all stakeholders.

The TDA is a document focused on the major water related environmental issues in the Bay that require international

cooperation to find solutions. Such problems include degradation of critical habitats which serve as the generators of biodiversity and breeding or nursery grounds for many important fish species.

Other issues highlighted include pollution from land based sources, for



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## TDA released

example industry and agricultural runoff along the various watersheds that flow into the Bay; and over-exploitation of living marine resources, that has resulted in the depletion of fish stocks. New issues identified include the effects of climate change.

The TDA will form the basis for discussion on the formulation of an international strategy of cooperation to address and mitigate the major issues facing the Bay of Bengal.

The national governments of each country will lead a process to create a new document called the Strategic Action Programme or SAP. The SAP will essentially be a framework of agreement between all the BOBLME nations to work together in solving or reducing the transboundary issues that are highlighted in the TDA. One of the major aims of the BOBLME Project is to strengthen regional cooperation and use this as a basis for addressing the environmental issues. Assisting each country in developing compatible management measures, research programmes and monitoring regimes will ultimately contribute to improve the health of the Bay. The TDA is the foundation of this work because it



represents

the common body of information and understanding that each country has participated in creating. The national consultations are the final stage of this ongoing process, and are expected to be completed in the first half of 2011. After the reviews and comments are gathered and analyzed, the document will then be revised accordingly and then sent out for adoption by each participating government. Once this is achieved, the process of creating the SAP will begin in earnest.

## Regional Coordination Unit starts the new year in a new office



*This building, located at the Andaman Sea Fisheries Research and Development Center, is now the office of the Regional Coordination Unit*

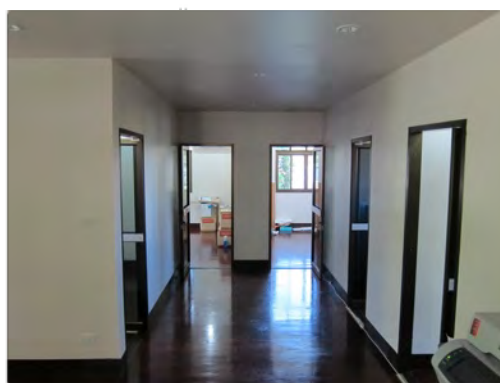
### The wait is over. No more temporary office space

PHUKET, THAILAND:

The Andaman Sea Fisheries Research and Development Center (part of the Thailand Department of Fisheries) is now hosting the BOBLME Regional Coordination Unit (RCU) in a newly renovated office building. The RCU is the nerve center of the Project. The building has four offices and a spacious greeting area / entryway. The RCU is located in picturesque Makhamb Bay near the deep sea port peninsula of Thailand's bustling Phuket Island.

The new office overlooks the edge of the Bay, atop a hill on the tree-shaded property. Regional Coordinator Chris O'Brien and Chief Technical Advisor Rudolf Hermes wish to express their gratitude to the Government of Thailand for hosting the BOBLME RCU and providing such a splendid work environment.

"Phuket is an especially scenic island, and we are fortunate to be located here in the Makhamb Bay, where a great deal of access to Thailand's relevant organizations is also assured. The Phuket Marine Biological Center, a BOBLME cooperation partner is only a few kilometers away." —Rudolf Hermes



"Ms Praulai Nootmorn, the National Coordinator for the Project in Thailand and Director of the Andaman Sea Fisheries Research and Development Centre has played a major role in getting us to where we are today" — Chris O'Brien, "and we are extremely grateful to Khun Praulai and her team. We also look forward to many of our future workshop events being convened here at the home base."

## Project Steering Committee to meet on 29-31 March, 2011

Invitations for the second annual meeting of the BOBLME Project Steering Committee to be held in Phuket from 29-31 March have been sent out. The Steering Committee is comprised of two members of each national government, with one member drawn from the major fisheries agency, and the other drawn from a relevant environmental agency. In addition, representatives from the funding agencies will also participate.

The focus of the meeting will be to review the Project's progress during 2010, and to set the work plan and the budget for the coming year. It will be an opportunity for each country to examine the Project's milestones and outputs and to discuss the next steps for moving forward.

The BOBLME Project is on track. Although the processes are often complicated by the very nature of working towards international consensus, a great deal of progress has been achieved since the Project started in April 2009 — still, a great deal of work lies ahead.



## Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem Project Highlights: the Year 2010 in Review

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Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis reviewed and released for National Consultations

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National Inception Workshops completed in six countries

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Training provided in Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries, livelihoods, stock assessment, and communications

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Regional workshops on fisheries statistics and land based pollution

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Working groups convened on oceanography/climate change, fisheries assessment and ecosystem health indicators

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Lessons learned/best practices reviews and workshops for Integrated Coastal Management (ICM) undertaken in South and Southeast Asia

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Critical habitat workshops relating to the Mergui/Myeik Archipelago held in Thailand and Myanmar;

Socio-economic assessments undertaken in the Gulf of Mannar

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Regional review of MPA status completed and ready for review by the BOBLME MPA Working Group

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Country assessments on endangered species (marine turtles) underway

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*The endangered dugong is a very specialized marine mammal that depends on the seagrass for its diet. —photo courtesy of Dr. Frederick Short, [SeagrassNet.org](http://SeagrassNet.org)*

## World Seagrass Conference held in Phuket

CLUB ANDAMAN RESORT, THAILAND

Hosted by Dr. Anchana Prathep, Prince of Songkla University, in conjunction with "SeagrassNet", and Dr. Frederick Short, University of New Hampshire (who was also the keynote speaker) the World Seagrass Conference brought together scientists from around the globe to share their knowledge and growing concern for the importance of seagrass as a critical marine habitat. BOBLME was on hand to gather information and to look for possible research partners and initiatives that may be supported under the BOBLME Project's charter. Seagrass is identified as one of three critical habitats under region-wide pressure in the Bay of

Bengal.

Seagrass contributes to a healthy coastal marine environment, providing habitat for commercially and recreationally important fish and shellfish species. It functions as nursery for young marine creatures. Seagrass filters the water of sediments and pollution; and the seagrass root mat adds stability to the coastal zone, and seagrass leaves lessen the impact of wave energy on the shoreline. As dead seagrass breaks down, it becomes part of the coastal food chain, supporting snails, shrimp, sea cucumbers, and fish. Throughout the region, people harvest seafood from seagrass meadows as a major source of protein.



# The Richness of the Gulf of Mannar

Endangered species such as dugongs and sea turtles eat seagrass, as do some fish and birds. In vast seagrass meadows, divers and snorkelers can observe "feeding trails" of dugongs, where these sea mammals have plowed along the bottom, eating seagrass as they go. A healthy seagrass resource is essential to dugongs and turtles.

Seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs are often linked ecologically and are arguably the most important habitats in the Bay of Bengal. Each contributes to a healthy coastal marine ecosystem. Mangroves filter the water coming off the land and create a stable shoreline. Seagrass further filters runoff and provides nursery areas for many of the fish that live in coral reefs as adults. Seagrass, as it dies and decomposes, provides a link in the food chain essential to coral reef animals. The seagrass-coral reef environment is a productive area of high biodiversity and beauty. Together, healthy seagrasses, mangroves, and coral reefs create a valuable coastal resource for fisheries and tourism.



Researchers setting a transect across a seagrass meadow—photo courtesy of Dr. Frederick Short, [SeagrassNet.org](http://SeagrassNet.org)

Harbouring over 3,000 species of fauna and flora, the Gulf of Mannar (GoM) is a haven for a huge variety of marine species including finfish, prawns, crabs, mollusks, oysters, mussels, sea cucumbers, corals, jellyfish and mammals such as dugongs. Vast areas of seagrass beds are also common in the region.

Acknowledging the species diversity, the Government of Sri Lanka has ear-marked the Sri Lanka side of the Gulf of Mannar to be nominated as a Biosphere Reserve under the Man & the Biosphere Programme of UNESCO.

A training manual on the Gulf of Mannar and its environs was prepared for this purpose. A teaching aid – a CD containing a power point presentation on "The Gulf of Mannar and its environs: richness, issues and sustainable use", a photo catalogue compiled from the photos taken during the surveys and related published material was also given to each teacher to assist them further in taking the message to the students of the Mannar District.

Following this programme, the third in the series targeting the fisher communities in Mannar district was held on 18 December at



Dr. Ranjith Mahindapala, Country Representative of IUCN Sri Lanka, conducting an environmental awareness raising seminar in Mannar

IUCN Sri Lanka, with support from the Mangroves for the Future Initiative (MFF), the University of Ruhuna and the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) Project undertook a rapid biodiversity survey in the GoM and Palk Bay as well as a socio-economic survey in the coastal Divisional Secretariat divisions bordering the GoM. The findings revealed the richness of natural, cultural and archaeological wealth of the area and some issues related to extraction of these resources.

An important component of this endeavour is to share these findings with the state agencies, fisher communities and other stakeholders. Accordingly, IUCN organized a series of awareness programmes in Mannar and the first of the series, for the Government officials, led by the Government Agent, Mannar was held in November 2010. The second programme targeting school children was held on 17 December at the Zonal Education Office in Mannar and was conducted through training of Master Teachers. Teachers of science, geography, history and social sciences (of Grade 9 to 11) from 31 schools in Mannar District participated.

the Local Government Office in Mannar. Twenty four fishers representing most of the fisheries societies in all six Fisheries Inspector Divisions together with another eight officials from the Fisheries Department attended this workshop. The discussion held following the presentations on the fishery resources and related issues brought out several important recommendations from the fishing communities on matters related to their livelihood.

Coincidentally, on one of the session days, during the awareness programme, the Navy and the Fisheries Inspectorate apprehended fishermen who had allegedly killed and brought ashore two dugongs. Dugongs are threatened, and the awareness programmes brought forth the message on conservation through this unfortunate incident.

The need for protection of the biodiversity in the GoM is now evident and it is hoped that these awareness programmes will help in conserving these resources.

# New website for BOBLME

[www.boblme.org](http://www.boblme.org)

## New functionality as well as new look and feel.

In response to the need to better communicate with the growing list of colleagues, organizations and government agencies – including implementation partners, the Regional Coordination Unit has been rebuilding the BOBLME website. The new website is designed to provide greater access to a rapidly growing body of documents and to provide a robust search engine to easily find the material you are looking for.

The website will also become a central platform for informing and updating all those who work with BOBLME about upcoming events, related news, meeting reports from past events, and about the BOBLME Project and the people involved in moving the Project forward.

The Communications Strategy adopted by the Project Steering Committee places a high value on the website as a means of bridging the gap between the

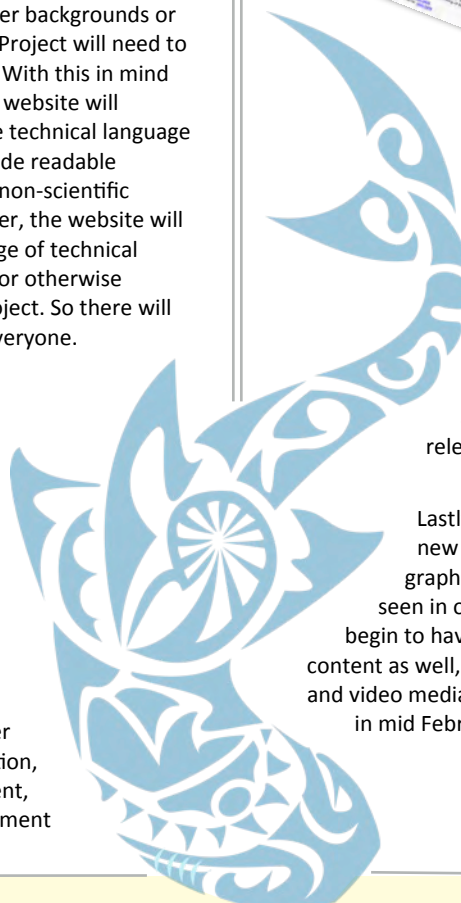
scientific and technical aspects of the program on the one hand, and those shaping management and policy decisions on the other, as well as the many people of other backgrounds or disciplines that the Project will need to communicate with. With this in mind the new face of the website will attempt to keep the technical language simplified and provide readable content also to the non-scientific community. However, the website will house the wide range of technical reports generated (or otherwise adopted) by the Project. So there will be something for everyone.

Other new content planned for the website is career profiles of our country counterparts. These provide a more personal look at the people involved in each of the eight countries that guide and steer the Project. In addition, the Project Document, the project development



documents, and the Project's TDA and SAP (as it is being formulated) will be available online. The website will also provide links to BOBLME partners, funding and implementing agencies, and to other relevant agencies.

Lastly, the website has a new look featuring the graphic banner you may have seen in our emails, and will begin to have some media rich content as well, including photos, audio and video media. Look for the new site in mid February.



## The BOBLME Regional Coordination Unit



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*This newsletter is a publication of the Regional Coordination Unit of the BOBLME Project, Phuket, Thailand. For further information about the project please visit our website at <http://www.boblme.org>*

*Newsletter design by Reid Ridgway, Phuket.*