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Response of GCRMN North, East and Southeast Asia Nodes to
“A New Direction for the GCRMN”
For Discussion

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Countries of Southeast Asia and North and East Asia nodes have been working together as a strong unit on coral reef monitoring and reporting for the Status of Coral Reefs of the World, one of the most important outputs from GCRMN activities. Regional capacities and resources in Southeast Asia were initially established under the ASEAN-Australia “Living Coastal Resources” project in the late 1980s and the network expanded since throughout Southeast Asia to contribute a key role on coral research and monitoring. At the same time, coral scientists in North and East Asia developed national networks to enhance monitoring activities until the late 1990’s when they started to support GCRMN reporting. These two nodes have worked more actively and closely since the late 1990’s with the assistance and coordination by Dr. Clive Wilkinson, the former GCRMN global coordinator, bringing both coordinators of Southeast and North and East Asia nodes together. The Ministry of the Environment, Japan has also continuously supported the activities in this region through funding and coordination.

The networks in this region have made three significant and major achievements through past and current efforts on coral monitoring and networking.

1. The First Asia Pacific Coral Reef Symposium (APCRS) was organized in Hong Kong, China in 2006 and at the Second APCRS in Phuket, Thailand in 2010. The Third APCRS is confirmed to be held at Taiwan in 2014. This symposium is organized as a regular meeting every four years with funding covered by the host institute and registration fees. The symposium provides a regular venue for national and regional scientists for the sharing of information on coral research and monitoring with a clear focus on involving the young scientists for future generation of the network.
2. Regional reports on the status of coral reefs were published and distributed in 2006 and 2010 following the APCRS. These regional reports were prepared to focus on the regional and national issues on coral monitoring and conservation for further discussion and sharing with managers, practitioners and decision makers as well as scientists.

3. The Asia Pacific Coral Reef Society (APCoRS) has been established by the GCRMN national and node coordinators of Southeast and North and East Asia since 2010 as a visible body of the network on coral monitoring and research in this region to organize the APCRS and prepare the regional status reports. The society also aims to invite and involve more people including governments, NPO/NGOs, local managers and private sectors into the current networks for more effective management and conservation of coral reefs in the region.

Through these three major achievements of the Southeast and North and East Asia Nodes, a strong, effective and practical East Asia regional network has been established. This network is much stronger than the geographical, political and administrative grouping proposed in the paper and has already been fully functioning with close collaboration of national and local scientists conducting the actual field data collection.

It was a great and unpleasant surprise for us to find out that the proposed position paper on a new GCRMN structure did not reflect our history and achievements under the present mechanisms of the region, in spite of initial discussions with the former global coordinator and the UNEP-IUCN representatives during the 6th and 7th ICRI East Asia Regional Workshops and personal communications with them. We are also highly disappointed that the proposed regional structure fails to recognize the current strong East Asia network and insulted that the region is now relegated to “Other parts of Asia”. We fail to understand the rationale for elevating the ‘Coral Triangle’ as a sub-region and cannot see why Southeast Asia (the global coral reef hotspot) is so casually made to lose its standing as a sub-region.

Besides the total lack of recognition of our past effort and contribution, the proposed regional structure includes duplications and does not show clear logical balances as mentioned below.

1. “Australasia” as a region is not appropriate— by definition, “Australasia is a region of Oceania comprising Australia, New Zealand, the island of New Guinea, and neighboring islands in the Pacific Ocean” (encyclopedia Britanica, 11th edition; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasia>). Thus, this term does not include the East Asia, North Asia or most of Southeast Asia. In contrast, geographically, ‘Australasia’ covers Australia and some of the eastern Indonesian islands on the Sahul Shelf together with New Guinea, Solomon island etc. The ‘Australasia’ region is clearly a misrepresentation compared to the other three regions.

Looking at the other three regions, they all have sub-regions that are geographically defined. The ‘Australasia’ region has only one geographically defined sub-region and that is Australia, and two sub-regions ‘Coral Triangle’ and ‘Other part of Asia’ that are not geographically well defined. The ‘Coral Triangle’ is simply a term that has no regional basis.

2. Coral Triangle – is a recently established functional grouping that excludes 6 of the 10 Southeast Asian countries and all of the 5 North and East Asian countries/nodes. The Coral Triangle Initiative is a complimentary part of the Southeast Asia region – it does not override it or replace it or make the region redundant.

3. “Other Parts of Asia” – is not clear and totally unacceptable. The current Southeast Asia Node includes 8 countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) and the North and East Asia node consists of 5 countries and states (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan and Korea). The proposed groupings of sub regions 1 (Coral Triangle), 2 (Other parts of Asia) and 3 (Australia) will disrupt the current network and collaborations that have been established by the Southeast Asia and the North and East Asia nodes.

To avoid misrepresentation and redundancy, we are proposing the ‘East Asia region’ as the fifth region with 2 sub regions of ‘Southeast’ and ‘North and East’ for the new GCRMN regional structure for improving the current functional *and functioning* network with regards to the proposed objectives 1 to 4. We also strongly suggest that proposals such as this be developed only after due consultation with existing node and national coordinators.

Proposed GCRMN regions for East Asia

Region:

East Asia Region

Sub-region:

1. North and East Asia
2. Southeast Asia

We also recommend including an objective 6, which is ‘to enhance the communication between the GCRMN core coordination team and practical members including the regional, sub-regional and national coordinators’. Providing information on coral status is one of the core tasks of GCRMN and is highly dependent on data collectors and coordinators for alerting the world to coral reef status. To realize those important activities, more communication between GCRMN core management group and the national and regional networks is necessary. Close communication will avoid future disappointment of regional and national members of GCRMN on decisions and agreements reached without consultation from the key players of the region.

In the document’s ‘Introduction’, it is stated that this transition from the former GCRMN network to stewardship by IUCN “presents an opportunity for a real change to move the Network in a new direction”. The rest of the document spells out some new reporting protocol still heavily reliant on regional networks but remains silent on funding issues to make this happen. This is another fundamental obstacle that we have been facing all along, but able to overcome through goodwill among members of our networks.