



Sub-Regional Consultation on Development of BOBLME Project Work Plan: 2026-27

16-17 April 2026 | Fortune Beach Resort, Chennai

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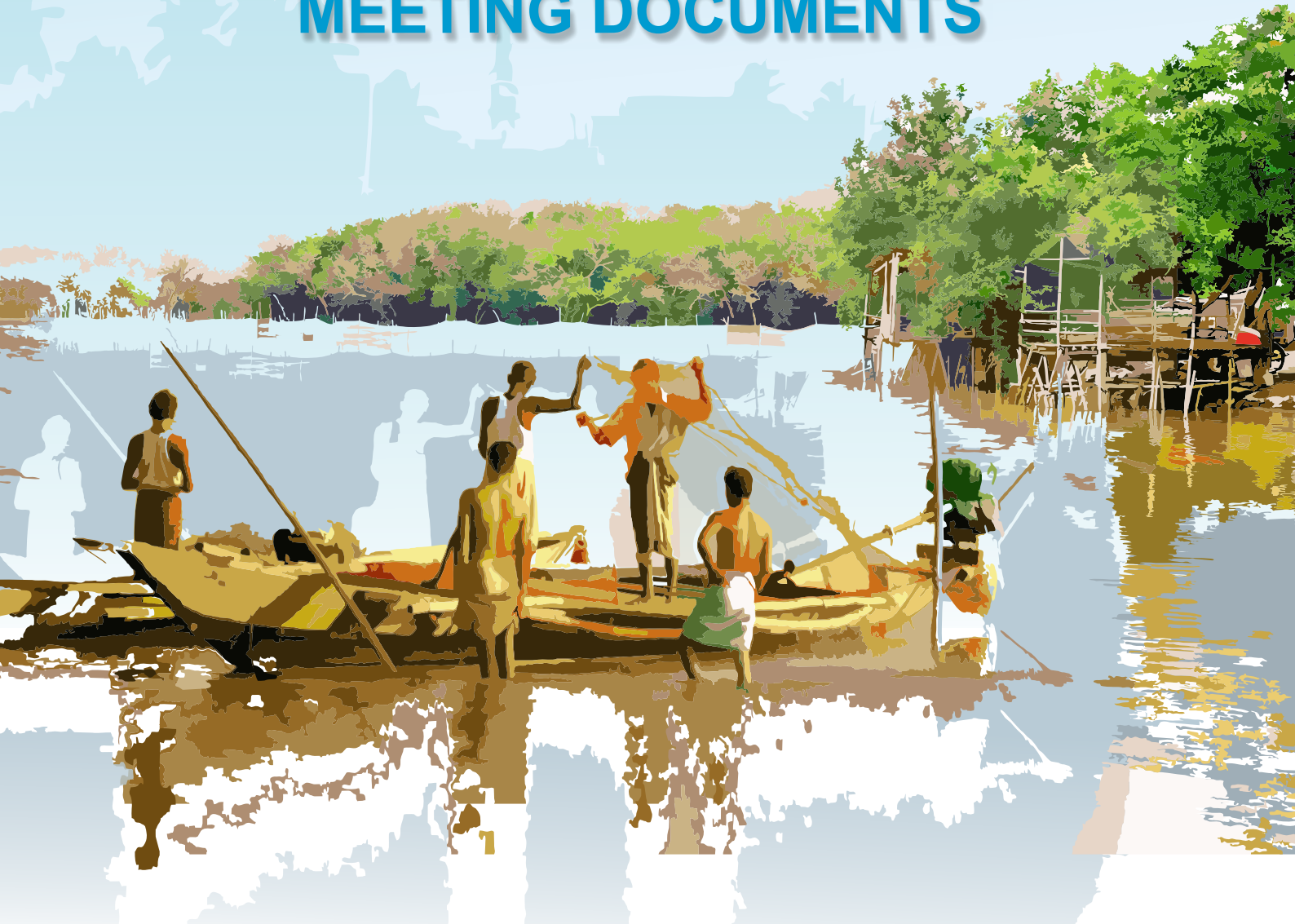


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MEETING DOCUMENTS





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Bay of Bengal Programme Inter-Governmental Organisation (BOBP-IGO)
91, Saint Mary's Road, Abhiramapuram, Chennai - 600 018. INDIA

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SESSION 1

EAFM IMPLEMENTATION & NATIONAL NETWORK CENTRES

**BOBP-IGO as the Regional Coordination Unit to
Support Establishment of National EAFM Centres &
Network of Co-Management Practitioners**

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

1. The Context

Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) seeks to develop sustainable and equitable fisheries management plans by balancing ecological and human well-being through good governance. Applying EAF is considered the preferred option and best practice for long-term sustainability of fisheries and the services that fisheries ecosystems provide to society.

Currently, BOBP-IGO is implementing Phase II of the BOBLME project, which is funded by GEF and NORAD and implemented by FAO. The main goal of the project is to establish at least two Fisheries Management Units (FMUs) in each member country (Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka). The EAFM component of BOBLME-II aims to develop fisheries management plans using EAFM principles, integrate these principles into national institutions and stakeholder processes, and build the capacity of practitioners to effectively apply EAFM in their work.

The detailed progress and workplan for the EAFM component under the BOBLME II project is provided under Agenda 7.

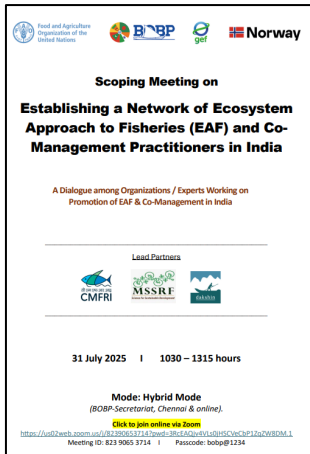
2. Mainstreaming EAFM: Building on Past Works

EAFM principles and initiatives have been implemented through various national-level institutions and civil society organizations at the grassroots level. Many individual and institutional efforts have been undertaken to pilot EAFM and co-management in the BOBP-IGO member countries before the start of the BOBLME Phase II Project. Significant work has been carried out by these practitioners; however, it has not been properly documented, and the success stories have not been adequately translated into national and state policies. To facilitate cross-learning, build on existing efforts, and engage practitioners in developing co-management arrangements at a larger scale, establishing networks of practitioners within each country is a practical option with a strong potential to achieve the desired outcomes.

It is essential to bring all such actors together, learn from their experiences and take them along during the capacity development opportunities under the BOBLME Phase II Project so that all such initiatives are effectively documented.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supports establishing Community of Practitioners (CoP) focused on EAFM, primarily through capacity development, training, and regional collaboration, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. This network connects fisheries managers, environmental officers, and technical specialists to share experiences and implement sustainable, participatory fisheries management.

BOBP-IGO organized a **Scoping Meeting on Establishing a Network of EAFM and Co-Management Practitioners in India**, under the aegis of BOBLME project, on 31 July 2025 at its Secretariat in Chennai. The meeting explored EAFM initiatives and good practices from various institutions, identified opportunities to build on these initiatives, and examined how to leverage the BOBLME-II project to develop the capacity.



During the consultation, the participants strongly opined that establishment of a National Centre for EAFM (C-EAFM) within a relevant national institute will greatly aid in coordinating the national actions in this regard, aligning them to the BOBLME project objectives and spearheading the EAFM in diverse fisheries. The national centres in the countries shall be networked to BOBP-IGO, which can serve as regional hub for coordination, implementation, and knowledge exchange. The structure can aid in sustaining the project activities beyond the life of BOBLME project.

3. Pilot Initiative in India: C-EAFM @ ICAR-CMFRI

BOBP-IGO in partnership with Environmental Defense India Foundation (EDIF) has established the BOBP-EDIF Centre for Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (C-EAFM) at ICAR-Central Marine Fisheries Research Institute (CMFRI), Kochi. This centre is envisioned to drive a scalable institutional ecosystem that would accelerate the adoption of EAFM across India through planning and implementation, capacity building, knowledge exchange, and alignment with global best practices.



BOBP-IGO shall act as a regional hub for the Network of EAF Practitioners, facilitating and strengthening the capacity building of national centres.

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

ICAR-CMFRI has provided the office space for the C-EAFM, designated a Senior Scientist as the nodal person, and has also created a network of scientists from its regional centres to working on EAFM BOBP-IGO arranged a specialized training for the participating scientists.

The key activities of the EAFM Centre are

- **Expansion of EAFM Sites** – Identify priority Fisheries Management Units (FMUs) / EAFM sites for planning and implementation. Document existing FMUs and identify new sites, while consolidating lessons learned, best practices, and case studies from the ongoing EAFM and co-management initiatives in India.

Expand the Network of Practitioners of EAF into a formal, member-based network comprising officials, scientists, NGOs, and progressive fishers.

- **Coordination of BOBLME-II EAFM Activities** – Develop work programmes for selected FMUs to assess fisheries characteristics; identify and prioritize key issues and stakeholders; establish co-management arrangements; and prepare, implement, and periodically review EAFM plans, adapting actions as needed. Establish effective working arrangements among partnering institutions for planning, implementation, and impact monitoring of EAFM interventions.

Engage with organizations with similar mandates such as the Department of Fisheries and NGOs to support wider adoption of EAFM across the country. Establish formal channels for engagement with FAO.

- **Capacity Building for EAFM Practitioners** – Strengthen capacity through knowledge sharing, training, and collaboration. Develop and maintain an EAFM knowledge repository, including case studies, challenges, and innovations, accessible to practitioners and policymakers. Co-organize EAFM capacity development programmes with partner organizations. Organize bi-annual workshops and facilitate the presentation of progress on EAFM in India at national and international fora.

Building on this initiative, BOBP-IGO has written to the selected maritime state governments in India to identify potential fishery for developing EAFM plans through ICAR-CMFRI, so as to leverage the BOBLME capacity development opportunities effectively.

With these efforts, in addition to the two EAFM sites selected under BOBLME project, EAFM plans are being prepared for SEVEN additional fishery management units (FMUs) under the aegis of BOBP-EDIF C-EAFM at ICAR-CMFRI (Details in **Annex 1**).

3. Proposal for Establishing C-EAFM in Member Countries

Building on this experience, BOBP-IGO is in discussion with FAO's EAF-Nansen to scale up this network in the member countries. FAO is all set to establish a Regional EAF Secretariat at BOBP-IGO for the BOBP-IGO region and support the targeted capacity building initiatives in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka.

In this context, BOBP-IGO proposes to support establishment of EAFM national centres in its member countries.

(a) *Proposed Institutional Mechanisms*

- **Establishment of national EAFM Centres** to network community of practitioners
- **Identification of Site / FMU coordinators** (ex-officio officers, to ensure sustained efforts)
- **Constitution of EAFM Working Group**, as required by the BOBLME-II project. It is proposed that a uniform regional composition may be adopted – The EAFM WG may be led by the National BOBLME Project Coordinator, and comprise of Site Coordinator(s), and C-EAFM Centres In-Charge/experts as members.

Proposed activities under the national EAFM centre

1. ***Piloting the EAF-Nansen Framework to assess Organizational Capacity to Implement EAF in BOBP-IGO countries:*** The EAF-Nansen Programme has developed a Framework for Assessing Organizational Capacity to Implement the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF). This analytical tool provides a structured methodology to evaluate institutional readiness, capacities, and coordination mechanisms necessary for effective implementation of EAF. The proposed Regional Secretariat for EAF to be established in the BOBP-IGO will undertake this assessment in coordination with national EAF centres in all four BOBP-IGO member countries and will document a comprehensive report.

The outcomes will provide an understanding of institutional strengths and gaps among Member States, thereby guiding targeted capacity development, policy alignment, and collaborative governance under the BOBLME Phase II. The results are expected to support evidence-based decision-making and enhance institutional coordination, contributing to the achievement of sustainable fisheries management in the region through the EAF.

2. ***Develop EAF aligned Fisheries Management Plans (FMPs) for selected commercial fisheries:*** EAF in the BOBP-IGO region has so far been applied primarily to small-scale fisheries, and the eight pilot sites identified under the BOBLME II project all represent small-scale fisheries. To demonstrate the broader applicability of the EAF concept to larger commercial fisheries, the Regional Secretariat, in coordination with EAF centres in BOBP-IGO member countries, will develop fisheries management plans for one model commercial fishery each in Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka with support from the EAF-Nansen Programme, and in India with funding from EDIF.

The Regional EAF Secretariat and EAF centres will work closely with national governments to implement these plans during the BOBLME II phase, leveraging the project's implementation mechanisms over the period 2026–2028.

BOBP-IGO in partnership with FAO developed Fishery Management Inventory (FMIInv) for 14 fisheries from BOBP-IGO member countries. The exercise provided key insights on the management and implementation gaps. The expert members who contributed to the exercise will be involved in the EAFM-FMP exercise.

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

3. Development of Regional ‘EAF-Nansen-type’ Survey Program: Scoping Report on Use of National Survey Assets for Regional Stock Assessment and Regional Science Plan:

The EAF-Nansen Programme, implemented by the FAO in partnership with the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), supports developing countries in applying the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) through improved scientific knowledge, capacity building, and sustainable management practices.

The RV *Dr. Fridtjof Nansen* and the collaborative efforts under the EAF-Nansen Programme exemplify the power of international cooperation in advancing ocean science and sustainable fisheries management. As the Programme continues to evolve, it remains a beacon of hope and a model for global collaboration aimed at preserving marine biodiversity and ensuring the health of our oceans for future generations.

Although RV Dr. Fridtjof Nansen conducts extensive ecosystem and resource assessments, its operations are conducted in waters deeper than 20 m, leading to potential underestimation of resource biomasses distributed in shallow grounds.

In the Bay of Bengal (BOB) region, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have been actively involved in EAF-Nansen Programme activities, benefiting from ecosystem surveys and training. However, there is a growing recognition of the need to expand and strengthen regional collaboration by establishing a regional network to scale up EAF research applications across all member countries. To achieve this, it is essential to develop a clear roadmap, science plan, and implementation mechanism that align national and regional priorities.

A regional ‘Nansen-type’ coordinated program was discussed during the EAF-Nansen Programme Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, during October 25-28, 2022, which aims to harness a regional network of vessels to conduct coordinated surveys, effectively addressing the RV Dr. Fridtjof Nansen's near-shore operational limitations.

The 5th Bay of Bengal Maritime Dialogues (BOBMD) organized by Centre for Humanitarian Development (HD) and Path Finder Foundation in Colombo called for operationalizing a regional fisheries resource survey¹.

BOBP-IGO shall organize a regional workshop in collaboration with FAO EAF Nansen Team to validate these plans, ensure coordination, and facilitate knowledge generation and sharing to advance the implementation of the ecosystem approach to fisheries management in the Bay of Bengal region. Initially, a dialogue will be facilitated, and the interest of the governments will be profiled. A comprehensive roadmap for implementation will be developed and plans for securing funding will be deliberated with the support of participating countries.

4. Sustaining EAF Initiatives in the BOBP-IGO Region beyond the Project/Pilot Period:

To sustain the momentum generated by the EAF initiatives in the region, the Regional EAF Secretariat and C-EAFMs will work closely with national governments to embed EAF initiatives within national fisheries programmes and scale them up further across countries. The Regional EAF Secretariat will also mobilize resources to sustain the role of the centres in providing continued handholding support and capacity-building initiatives.

¹https://pathfinderfoundation.org/images/publications/policy%20papers%20and%20reports/2025/Final%20outcome_5th%20BBMD-1.pdf

Annex 1**Summary of the EAFM/EAA sites in India for which
Implementation plans are under preparation**

No.	Fishery Management Unit	State/UT	Partners	Funding Source
Development of EAFM Plans and Implementation				
1	Pichavaram Mangrove Ecosystem fisheries	Tamil Nadu	BOBP-IGO, CMFRI, DoF-TN	BOBLME-II (GEF IW)
2	Coringa Mangrove Ecosystem fisheries	Andhra Pradesh	BOBP-IGO, CMFRI, DoF-AP	BOBLME-II (GEF IW)
Development of EAFM Plans (only)				
3	Chennai Trawl Fishery	Tamil Nadu	BOBP-IGO, FAO, CMFRI	FAO
4	Kanyakumari Lobster Fishery	Tamil Nadu	BOBP-IGO, EDIF, CMFRI	EDIF
5	Puducherry backwater lagoon fishery	Puducherry	BOBP-IGO, DoF-Puducherry	BOBLME-II / BOBP-IGO
6	Karaikal cluster-based fisheries	Puducherry	BOBP-IGO, DoF-Puducherry	BOBLME-II / BOBP-IGO
7	Chilika Lake Fishery	Odisha	BOBP-IGO, IUCN, CDA	BOBLME-II / BOBP-IGO
8	Godhavari Delta Shrimp Farming – Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA)	Andhra Pradesh	BOBP-IGO, FAO, MPEDA-NaCSA	FAO
9	Cauvery Delta Shrimp Farming– Ecosystem Approach to Aquaculture (EAA)	Tamil Nadu	BOBP-IGO, FAO, MPEDA-NaCSA	FAO



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SESSION 2

EAFM: Managing Shared Stocks Piloting Management Plan for Selected Shared Fisheries in the BOBP region

1. The Context

Shared fish stocks constitute a significant ecological and economic component of fisheries in the Bay of Bengal. Major commercial species such as tropical tuna, shrimps, hilsa shad, croakers, mackerels, snappers. Groupers, sharks/rays, seer-fish, neritic tunas, anchovies, and pony fishes are distributed along the Bay, making unilateral management measures sub-optimal with direct consequences for the food security and livelihoods of fishing communities across the region. In addition, long-term trend analysis of the shared stocks shows a steady increase in the number of fully and over-exploited stocks¹, reinforcing the urgent need for collaboration.

The XIII Governing Council of BOBP-IGO formally endorsed a Strategy Paper on shared fish stock management and mandated the Secretariat to mobilise resources for pilot implementation. The present proposal fulfils that mandate.

The Proposal: The proposal for managing shared fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal tackles three persistent, interconnected challenges. The first is scientific: there is often no clear consensus on what level of evidence on the status of shared stocks is the benchmark to justify collective action, leading to prolonged and less effective stock assessment processes. The second is institutional: even when scientific data is adequate, cooperation may falter due to the high transaction costs of operating across different legal frameworks, administrative procedures, and fisheries regulations. The third is social and political: cross-border acceptance of management measures by fishers is not automatic, especially when national sovereignty, cultural practices, competing national interests, and enforcement burdens influence decision-making. The pilot programme aims to contribute to addressing these challenges collectively through a practical and collaborative approach.

That is, the pilot is proposed to deliver the following:

- **Establishing a minimum information criterion that can generate action**
- **Demonstrating a framework that can meet the transaction costs of collaboration.**
- **Inform binational and regional political processes to derive synergy between countries (RECs) and Regional Fishery Bodies (long-term goal)**

2. The Proposed Workplan

The pilot initiative: The pilot initiative will cover a few prioritized shared species which are commercially important. Given the pilot nature of the activity, it is proposed that the species be selected based on their contribution to livelihoods, distribution across and between national EEZs, the degree of shared-stock interdependence, and its current status. **A list of candidate species and selection criteria is given in Annexure 1.** *The TAC members and experts would review and revise this matrix (species, criteria) during the consultation.*

Execution of the pilot: It is proposed that the pilot execution will be managed by BOBP-IGO involving the Bay of Bengal Stock Assessment Network (BOBSAN) - comprising government-designated stock assessment scientists from member countries, and other subject matter experts. BOBSAN will compile available data and assess stock status, and the experts and stakeholders will be consulted to translate the findings into management-relevant advice for the selected species.

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0308597X25002817>

The work is inherently collaborative: scientists from different national systems need to agree on methods, reconcile data, and arrive at shared conclusions. The working relationships and common analytical frameworks that come out of this process are themselves a durable regional asset, over and above the immediate outputs of the pilot.

Coordination and backstopping from BOBP-IGO will include financial arrangements for the pilot. As and when required, BOBP-IGO will connect the pilot with competent regional and international organisations such as FAO to support capacity building and global standard setting.

Management framework: The ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM) will be the underlying management principle for the pilot. In practice, this means that the pilot will develop plans for ecological and species well-being, human well-being by considering socioeconomic factors, and suggest effective governance mechanism for the shared stocks. This is in line with the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) of the BOBLME Project as well as the national policies of the member countries. The pilot will directly contribute to SDG 14, specifically Target 14.4, which calls for sustainable harvesting of fish stocks by 2020 and restoration of overfished stocks. Possible tools to use here are FISHPAT and EAFM-IMT to set the baseline and track progress on these indicators.

Result sharing and scaling up: The pilot will directly inform BOBP-IGO’s workplan and future initiative including the development of a regional management framework for shared fish stocks as mandated by the member countries. Secondly, the pilot will inform the existing bilateral fisheries joint work groups and regional economic organisations. It is expected that countries will consider integrating the technical expertise available within BOBP (BOBSAN) with the political will of the RECs to arrive at holistic solutions. The proposed steps for setting up the pilot are given in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Proposed Steps for Piloting Management of a Shared Fish Stock

Step	Activity	Lead Role	Supporting Role	Expected Output
1	Identification of candidate shared species and development of selection criteria	TAC, GCM, Member Countries	BOBSAN, BOBP-IGO	List of candidate species and selection framework agreed
2	Compilation and review of available data (catch, effort, biology, distribution, trade, social and economic dimensions, regulations)	BOBSAN / BOBP-IGO	National research institutes, fisheries departments	Joint Species Profile
3	Identification of stock status, data gaps, and key management issues	BOBSAN / BOBP-IGO	National experts	Technical note on stock status and management issues
4	National review of existing management measures, legal frameworks, and data systems	BOBP-IGO / Expert Committee	National experts	National diagnostic notes
5	Regional consultation to compare national approaches	BOBP-IGO	Member Countries	Comparative matrix of management measures Identification of areas for compatible or harmonised measures

Step	Activity	Lead Role	Supporting Role	Expected Output
6	Documentation of lessons and recommendations for national and regional processes	BOBP-IGO	BOBSAN, Member Countries	Pilot report and recommendations to TAC/GC

Limitations

The pilot is explicitly not a binding regional fisheries management regime. **BOBP-IGO functions as a Regional Fisheries Advisory Body (RFAB), not as a Regional Fisheries Management Organisation (RFMO).** All outputs will be voluntary, consultative, and non-binding. The pilot should therefore be assessed against the following realistic scope:

What the pilot can deliver: a joint species profile, national diagnostic notes, a comparative management matrix, and a formal advisory recommendation to TAC and GC; as well as the potential transmission of outputs for consideration as knowledge inputs to the bilateral mechanism, such as JWG of India – Sri Lanka or BIMSTEC working group on fisheries, etc.

What the pilot cannot deliver: Binding management measures; reactivation of dormant bilateral mechanisms; elimination of data gaps for data-deficient stocks; or changes in fishing practices

3. Funding the Pilot

BOBP-IGO, in alignment with the recommendations of the XII and XIII GC, shall endeavour to seek external funding support from development partners and international programmes to support specific technical activities, regional consultations, and analytical work associated with the pilot.

Currently BOBP-IGO has signed an agreement with Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, and in conversation with FAO for future partnership and cooperation towards development of fisheries management plan and piloting this framework in the BOBP-IGO member countries.

4. Significance of the Pilot

Growing global focus on regional collaboration: International concern over shared fish stock management is rising. Recent statements from the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) highlight the increasing importance of the “Duty to Cooperate” among nearby states. Since the Bay of Bengal is a semi-enclosed sea, it is governed by Part IX of UNCLOS (Articles 122 and 123), which urges bordering countries to work together in exercising their rights and fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. The United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) is of particular relevance in this context.

International instruments operationalize this cooperative framework. The Agreement on Port State Measures (PSMA, 2009) reflects the spirit of Article 123 through enhanced international cooperation against IUU fishing, including information sharing and inspections. The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (2022; entered into force 2025) also embodies cooperative principles by prohibiting subsidies linked to IUU fishing, overfished stocks, and unregulated high seas fishing, and by requiring transparency through subsidy notifications and stock status

reporting. The BBNJ Agreement (2023; entered into force 2026) further advances coordination among states for marine resource conservation and scientific research. The United Nations Fish Stocks Agreement (UNFSA) is of particular relevance in this context.

Cooperation for market access: Furthermore, emerging trade regimes of the European Union and the United States increasingly demand proof of legal and sustainable harvesting for market entry. While these measures are implemented at the national level, they indirectly encourage regional cooperation to ensure and demonstrate the sustainability of shared fish stocks.

This means that cooperation is no longer purely a moral obligation; it is becoming a requirement for trade and market access (WTO-AFS is key here).

The long-term goal of the proposed pilot is to gradually build a practical and durable regional arrangement for cooperation on shared fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal, consistent with the advisory mandate of BOBP-IGO and the cooperative spirit of Article 123 of UNCLOS.

5. Scaling Up and Sustaining the Benefits from the Pilot

After the implementation of pilot, BOBP-IGO would consolidate the experiences, lessons learned, technical outputs, and institutional arrangements emerging from the pilot into a larger programme proposal or Full-Scale Project (FSP) for submission to funding mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility (GEF) International Waters Programme, the World Bank, or other regional and international funding windows.

In the longer term, the approach may focus on providing soft support to national initiatives, such as technical advice, capacity building, scientific collaboration, and policy guidance, while mobilising fuller support for regional initiatives, including joint research, regional stock assessment processes, data-sharing platforms, and coordinated management measures for shared fish stocks. ***This approach would allow the pilot to gradually evolve into a sustained regional cooperation programme on shared fish stock management in the Bay of Bengal.***

The pilot is intended to serve as a practical starting point for regional cooperation on shared fish stocks, building technical confidence, institutional arrangements, and financing pathways that may eventually support a more structured regional programme for shared stock management in the Bay of Bengal.

6. Expected Outcome

Over time, the approach would be to strengthen the link between science, advice, and policy through BOBSAN as the technical platform and BOBP-IGO as the coordinating and advisory body, while national and bilateral arrangements remain the main channels for implementation. This could lead to regular regional stock reviews, use of shared methodologies, comparable management indicators, advisory guidance on selected shared species, and gradually more compatible national management measures.

The long-term institutional value of the pilot would depend upon building regional public goods such as scientific collaboration to create evidences, advisory processes, data-sharing practices, and continued management dialogue, while regulatory decisions remain with member countries.

TAC-11 Meeting Documents

In this way, the pilot could become the basis for a larger regional cooperation arrangement on shared fish stocks, capable of attracting external funding, supporting national initiatives through technical and policy assistance, and enabling regional activities such as joint assessments, coordinated research, shared information platforms, and dialogue on compatible management measures.

7. Project Log frame

Results level	Statement	Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions / risks
Impact <i>Long-term, beyond pilot</i>	Shared fish stocks in the Bay of Bengal are managed more sustainably, supporting stock recovery and long-term fishery productivity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pilot species show stable or improving stock status within 10 years. 2. At least one compatible management measure is applied by two or more member countries. 	FAO stock status reports; BOBSAN stock reviews; national fisheries statistics	Continued political commitment; no major climate, market, or geopolitical shocks
Outcomes				
Outcome 1 <i>Technical</i>	Joint evidence base for the pilot species is developed and used to produce an advisory recommendation for TAC and GC.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Joint species profile completed. 2. National diagnostic inputs received from member countries. 3. Advisory recommendation submitted to TAC and GC. 	BOBP-IGO quality review record TAC review report GC resolution on pilot report	Sufficient data available; timely national inputs
Outcome 2 <i>Institutional</i>	BOBSAN and BOBP-IGO serve as the science–advice interface for the pilot species, with outputs informing at least one bilateral mechanism.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recommendations shared with at least one bilateral mechanism. 2. BOBSAN referenced in at least one bilateral meeting record or communiqué. 3. BOBLME engaged in at least two technical activities. 	Transmittal letters; bilateral meeting records; GC record;	Relevant bilateral mechanism remains active; advisory role is accepted by member countries

Piloting Management Plan for Shared Stocks

Results level	Statement	Indicators	Means of verification	Assumptions / risks
Preconditions				
Pre-condition <i>TAC-XI then GC-XIV</i>	TAC selects the pilot species and endorses the proposal; GC approves implementation.	1. Pilot species recorded in TAC meeting report. 2. GC approval recorded.	TAC report; GC resolution	No major divergence among member countries while selecting the species
Outputs (12 months)				
Output 1 Month 1–3 BOBLME engaged as technical partner	Joint species profile prepared.	1. Profile completed and quality reviewed. 2. Data compiled from member countries. 3. Key data gaps identified	Technical report; quality review record	National data are shared in time
Output 2 Month 4–7 <i>BOBLME engaged in regional consultation</i>	National diagnostic notes and a comparative management matrix completed.	1. Diagnostic inputs received from member countries. 2. Matrix identifies major areas of compatibility or divergence. 3. Regional consultation held.	National submissions; matrix document; consultation report	Countries respond to the diagnostic template; consultation is convened as planned
Output 3 Month 8–10	Pilot report with advisory recommendations prepared and submitted for review.	1. Pilot report completed and quality reviewed. 2. Report endorsed by TAC. 3. Report submitted to GC.	Quality review record; TAC endorsement; GC agenda/record	Report quality is sufficient for endorsement
Output 4 Month 11–12 <i>After GC final approval</i>	GC-approved recommendations shared with at least one bilateral mechanism, and an FSP concept note prepared.	1. GC approval obtained. 2. Recommendations transmitted to at least one bilateral mechanism. 3. FSP concept note prepared.	GC resolution; transmittal record; concept note	Bilateral mechanism is receptive

Annexure

Selection Criteria for Shared Species

This annexure provides a framework for selecting candidate shared fish species for pilot-scale regional cooperation. The goal is to ensure species are not chosen solely on the basis of political or economic importance, but also because they demonstrate biological connectivity across jurisdictions, have measurable fishery significance, show evidence of management needs, and possess sufficient data to support a joint technical review. In shared-stock management, FAO guidance emphasises biological information, data comparability, joint assessment, and early scientific cooperation as the essential basis for coordinated action²

A candidate species should ideally satisfy most of the following conditions: it should occur across two or more national waters or ecologically connected systems; show evidence of shared recruitment, migration, habitat linkage, or stock connectivity; have clear commercial, nutritional, or livelihood importance; exhibit signs of fishing pressure, overexploitation, or management concern; possess at least a minimum information base on catch, effort, size structure, biology, and distribution.

Criteria for Selecting Shared Species

Criterion	Description
Transboundary distribution	Species occur across two or more national EEZs, coastal waters, estuaries, lagoons, or river-sea systems
Biological connectivity	Evidence of shared stock structure, migration (adult / young ones)
Fishery importance	Species contribute substantially to landings, income, export earnings, or food supply
Livelihood dependence	Fishers, processors, traders, and coastal communities depend materially on the species
Need for Management	Evidence of overfishing, high juvenile catch, declining size, high effort, habitat degradation, or other sustainability concerns
Data adequacy	Availability of catch, effort, length-frequency, biological, habitat, or trade information from at least part of the range
Scope for management comparability	Existing measures, such as seasons, gear controls, juvenile protection, or habitat closures, can be compared across countries

² FAO, 2000. FAO Technical Guidelines for Responsible Fisheries - Fisheries Management - 4 Suppl. 1 - 1. Conservation and Management of Sharks

Scoring Criteria

Scores may be assigned based on relevance categories: High, Moderate, Low, or Unknown. A species can be shortlisted if it scores at least Moderate across the four key criteria: transboundary distribution, biological connectivity, management urgency, and data adequacy.

Species Selected for Pilot

Hilsa (*Tenualosa ilisha*) is an anadromous pelagic fish of great ecological, economic, and social importance in the Bay of Bengal. Although it is found in several littoral countries along the Indian Ocean, the main focus of fishery, production, and management efforts lies in the India-Bangladesh region. Living in marine, estuarine, and riverine habitats, Hilsa's life cycle connects coastal waters with major river systems, especially the Ganga-Padma-Meghna and Hooghly-Bhagirathi. The fishery supports the livelihoods of millions of fishers, traders, processors, and related communities, making it one of the region's most vital shared fishery resources (Hossain et al., 2019).

Indian mackerel (*Rastrelliger kanagurta*) is a vital small pelagic resource in the northern Indian Ocean, exploited on both sides of India-Sri Lanka, especially in the wider Palk Bay-Gulf of Mannar seascape. Due to its commercial significance and the ecological connectivity of these waters, coordinated monitoring of landings, size composition, seasonal occurrence, and fishing effort between Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka would help improve stock understanding and reduce management fragmentation. As part of a pilot initiative, Indian mackerel could therefore serve as a practical candidate for bilateral scientific cooperation and harmonised assessment discussions between India and Sri Lanka.

Green tiger prawn (*Penaeus semisulcatus*), also known in trade as the Mandapam flower shrimp, is an economically important crustacean resource in the Palk Bay region and is particularly significant to the southeast coast of India (Rajkumar et al., 2024). Recent studies from Palk Bay show that this species contributes a substantial share of penaeid shrimp landings, indicating its importance and the need for closer attention to stock status, exploitation patterns and habitat linkages (Rajkumar et al., 2024). Because the Palk Bay ecosystem is shared by India and Sri Lanka, and because shrimp resources are affected by fishing pressure, nursery-ground conditions and gear interactions, green tiger prawn also offers a useful case for bilateral dialogue on evidence-based management

Owing to the transboundary distribution, migratory nature, and shared ecosystem of these resources, their management requires a coordinated regional or bilateral approach. Nonetheless, the situation in the Bay of Bengal differs from formal regional fisheries management organisations that possess binding decision-making authority.

In this region, cooperation on shared stocks should develop through scientific collaboration, policy dialogue, confidence-building, and voluntary alignment of national management strategies, rather than through immediate, binding regional measures. Hence, a one-year pilot programme provides a practical and achievable starting point to foster cooperation while respecting individual national legal and administrative frameworks.



Sub-Regional Consultation on Development of BOBLME Project Work Plan: 2026-27

16-17 April 2026 | Fortune Beach Resort, Chennai

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SESSION 3

Regional Cooperation in SSF
BOBP-IGO as the Regional Secretariat to
Support Development of NPOA-SSF

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

1. The Context

In the Bay of Bengal region, SSF is ubiquitous and characterized by family-oriented practices, relatively low level of technology and low capital. Despite its significant contribution to coastal communities and economies, the sector faces significant policy, institutional and infrastructural gaps that prevent its sustainable development.

The BOBLME Phase II focuses on Sustainable Fisheries through supporting the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries Management (EAFM) and addressing IUU fishing (Component 1 of the BOBLME-II). This component addresses some of the threats facing small-scale fisheries. However, a holistic perspective is required for which not only conservation, but a human-rights based approach needs to be followed to ensure improvement of the sector. This can be achieved through the structured implementation of FAO's Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication (SSF Guidelines).

BOBP-IGO organized a High-Level Meeting (HLM) in Maldives on 20 February 2025 under the aegis of the BOBLME-II project, wherein the member-countries of the BOBP-IGO took note of various issues plaguing the SSF sector in the region, viz., difficulty in policy targeting, resource constraints, internal and external competition and climate change. The delegates acknowledged the diversity of SSF systems and emphasized the need for better characterization of the sector to enable effective and sustainable interventions.

During the HLM, the delegates unanimously agreed that the member countries need to develop National Plan of Action (NPOA) on Small Scale Fisheries (SSF), embedding an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM) and BOBP-IGO and FAO may contribute towards strengthening capacity in the development process.

The NPOA-SSF would secure and sustain the contribution of small-scale fisheries to economy and nutrition while expanding the scope of human choices. It would focus on key areas such as governance, social development, gender equality, value chains, and environmental sustainability.



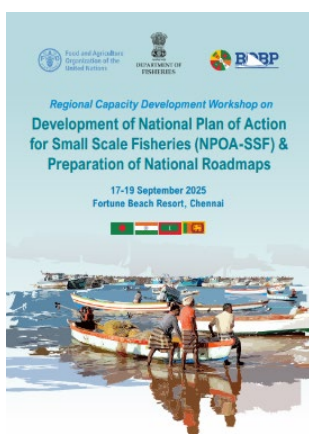
The XIII Governing Council of BOBP-IGO held immediately after the HLM adopted the recommendations of the HLM and mandated BOBP-IGO to organize a capacity development programme at the regional level and assist the members in development of the NPOA-SSF leveraging the BOBLME project.

2. Progress Made By BOBP-IGO

BOBP-IGO, in partnership with the FAO, initiated a series of activities to support the development of NPOA-SSF in the region. It is aligned with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries and organically supports an ecosystem approach to fisheries management (EAFM).

2.1. Regional Capacity Development Workshop on NPOA-SSF & Preparation of National Roadmaps

BOBP-IGO organized a Regional Capacity Development Workshop on NPOA-SSF in Chennai (17–19 September 2025), in close collaboration with FAO and Department of Fisheries (Government of India). It brought together stakeholders from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka to advance sustainable small-scale fisheries through structured national planning. The workshop focused on understanding the three-stage NPOA-SSF process, addressing key themes such as tenure rights, gender equality, value chains, and climate resilience, with practical insights drawn from the Philippines which has gone through the process. Participating countries emphasized inclusive, human rights-based approaches and agreed to develop separate NPOA-SSF plans for inland and marine fisheries in Bangladesh and India.



During the Workshop the BOBP-IGO member countries resolved to take all steps needed to develop full-fledged National Plans of Action for Small-Scale Fisheries (NPOA-SSF) in a time-bound manner.

2.2. Regional Inception Workshop for the NTF on NPOA-SSF

Following the regional capacity-building workshop, BOBP-IGO member countries established the National Task Forces (NTFs) to develop the NPOA-SSF, with continuous support from BOBP-IGO and FAO. Bangladesh and India resolved to constitute the NTF separately for freshwater and marine sectors of fisheries.

BOBP-IGO in collaboration with FAO and Govt. of Sri Lanka, organized a Regional Inception Workshop for the NTF members from 20–22 November 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on the sidelines of World Fisheries Day. The workshop brought together 50 NTF members and subject matter experts from Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. Country profiles and

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

Legal and Policy Analysis for the four countries were prepared by BOBP IGO and refined with inputs from the countries as well as FAO.

The participants were taken through the FAO guidelines for development of NPOA-SSF through step-by-step hands-on training and participatory exercises. At the end of the workshop, participants had prepared the process document for planning the preparation of the NPOA-SSF.

3. BOBP as Regional Secretariat for NPOA Development

In order to support the collective resolve of the member countries, FAO has designated BOBP-IGO as the NPOA-SSF Regional Secretariat to support the development process for the period between December 2025 to 30 Sep 2026 to support its member countries in the development and implementation of NPOA-SSF. FAO and BOBP-IGO have signed a Letter of Agreement to support capacity-building for NPOA-SSF initiative.

As a regional secretariat, BOBP-IGO shall support the NTF towards achieving the following outputs:

Output 1: Stakeholder mapping finalized and detailed consultation plan for each country prepared

Output 2: NPOA-SSF intervention logic, logframe developed and advisory boards (national platforms) proposed.

Output 3: A report comprising national roadmap / development plan outlining the next steps, actions, timelines and support needed to develop NPOAs-SSF.

BOBP-IGO worked closely with the subject matter experts, members of the BOB Policy Research Group (BOBPRG) from member countries and task force members and has completed the following tasks:

- 1. SSF Country Profile:** A country profile focusing on the requirements of the NPOA-SSF was prepared for each of the four countries based on the template provided by the FAO. These profiles were circulated to the NTF members and experts and revised based on their inputs. The country profiles were provided to the NTF members during the Inception Workshop in Colombo in November 2025.

It was agreed that the Country Profile would be a joint publication of the National Governments and BOBP-IGO and shall remain as a Working Document for continued improvement during development of the NPOA-SSF.

- 2. National Legal Reports on SSF:** A policy and legal analysis of each country's legislation and its alignment with SSF requirements was carried out based on the toolbox provided by the FAO. The three tools considered international conventions related to small-scale fishers, the country's laws specifically addressing small-scale fishery requirements and community perspectives on the legislation. The reports were circulated to the NTF members and FAO and revised based on feedback. The reports were provided to the NTF members during the Inception Workshop in Colombo in November 2025.

It was agreed that the Legal Report would be a joint publication of the National Governments and BOBP-IGO and remain as a Working Document for continued improvement during the development of NPOA-SSF.

3. **IHH Infographic:** An infographic using data from the Illuminating Hidden Harvests (IHH) report for each country was prepared and circulated to the NTF members.
4. **Special IHH Session:** Because of the difficulties in classifying small-scale fisheries, a special orientation was organized with the FAO's IHH team for the NTF members from the countries to help them understand the framework for classifying small-scale fisheries so that they can apply it for their countries to develop working definitions of small-scale fishers (SSF).
5. **NPOA Development Plan:** In order to support the NPOA development by the member countries, BOBP-IGO team developed the DRAFT Development Plan, following the FAO's NPOA-SSF handbook and incorporating the key outputs from the NTF members during the hands-on sessions at the Inception Workshop in Colombo in November 2025.

The NPOA Development Plan contains the summary SSF profile, intervention logic, identification and mapping of key stakeholders, governance review and gap analysis, rationale for an NPOA-SSF, the plan development template and details of the Task Force (members, role etc.). The documents also include some components of Phase 2 such as the stakeholder consultation plan. These documents were prepared for each country, in close consultation with the regional experts and national NTF members.

In the case of India and Bangladesh, separate documents were prepared for the marine sector and the inland sector.

The Plans have been shared with the national NPOA-SSF coordinators for further internal review and finalization.

6. **Periodic Consultations by FAO and BOBP with NTF:** While BOBP-IGO provides all the assistance as requested by the NPOA-SSF NTF members, it organizes fortnightly coordination meetings with the FAO SSF team and the NTF members to share progress, exchange experiences, clarify processes towards finalization of the NPA SSF Development Plan and the next steps.

4. Next Steps

The following milestones have been agreed by the member countries during the Colombo Meeting in order to undertake the development of NPOA-SSF as a regional mission programme.

1. NTF to review the preparation phase documents viz., Country Profile, Legal Report and Development Plan and finalize (May-Jun 2026)
2. Present the documents to the Advisory Body and seek inputs to strengthen the plan and incorporate the key inputs. (June 2026)
3. Public Launch of the Development Plan to the Stakeholders to seek feedback (Jul, 2026): NTF to organize in consultation with BOBP-IGO under the aegis of the BOBLME Project.



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SESSION 4 (A)

Implementation Strategy for BOB

RPOA-IUU: 2025–2030

A Roadmap for Bay of Bengal Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing

Implementation Strategy for the BOB RPOA-IUU 2025–2030

Purpose	To provide a sequenced, country-differentiated implementation strategy for the 20 actions of the BOB RPOA-IUU over 2025–2030, using the Secretariat’s revised simulation that distinguishes threshold actions from staged procedural actions.
Core strategic proposition	Secure institutional foundations first; build national operating systems next; operationalise the regional coordination-and-data backbone thereafter. Threshold actions should be treated as entry conditions, not as evidence of substantive implementation.
Read with caution	This note is a Secretariat planning aid. It is not a forecast, a formal evaluation, or a substitute for country consultations, legal review, budget clearance, and political guidance.

1. Background and Purpose

The Bay of Bengal Regional Plan of Action to Prevent, Deter and Eliminate Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing (BOB RPOA-IUU) is the first regional IUU governance instrument for the Bay of Bengal and one of a four such regional cooperation frameworks globally. It was endorsed by the four BOBP-IGO member-countries—Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka during the XII Governing Council Meeting of BOBP-IGO in February 2025¹, following a structured process of regional consultation, technical deliberation, drafting, validation and legal-administrative examination carried forward through BOBP-IGO. Developed as a voluntary framework for coordinated action across the EEZs of the member countries and the adjacent ABNJ during 2025–2030, the BOB RPOA-IUU is aligned with the FAO IPOA-IUU, the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, SDG 14, PSMA and related international guidance. Throughout this journey, BOBP-IGO worked with partner agencies, notably FAO and UNODC, whose engagement helped inform the technical, legal and operational thinking that supported the preparation of the Plan and its transition from adoption to implementation.

The BOB RPOA-IUU, as agreed by the member-countries of BOBP-IGO, is a voluntary regional instrument covering Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka marine waters and adjacent high seas for an initial period from 2025 to 2030. The Plan contains twenty actions ranging from formal adoption and nomination of focal points to vessel records, port State inspection planning, information sharing, catch documentation, monitoring of IUU magnitude, technical assistance and periodic capacity evaluation.

¹ The supporting letters from different countries were received on different date and the process finally completed in November 2025.

This note therefore translates the simulation into a practical implementation strategy typically adopted by BOBP-IGO regional programmes: country-owned, sequenced, operationally realistic, and capable of being revised after periodic review.

2. Process for Preparation of the Implementation Plan

The implementation plan for the BOB RPOA-IUU was prepared through a structured transition from policy adoption to operational design, rather than by reopening the negotiated text of the RPOA itself. The process combined four complementary streams of work:

- First, a peer-learning exercise on 23 March 2026, organised by BOBP-IGO with FAO under BOBLME-II, to examine how other regions had translated regional IUU cooperation frameworks into working arrangements on vessel records, port State controls, information exchange, traceability and coordinated MCS;
- Second, an expert consultation on 26 March 2026 to assess the legal, administrative and institutional feasibility of implementation within the domestic systems of member countries;
- Third, an internal Secretariat exercise on alignment of existing national legal and policy framework with BOB RPOA; and
- Fourth, a scenario-based simulation exercise to test how the actions were likely to progress under different combinations of funding and administrative support, while distinguishing between threshold actions, such as focal point designation and stakeholder notification, and slower procedural actions requiring sustained coordination and system-building.

Key insights from this combined process were that

- ***Implementation must be phased and sequenced.*** The webinar, legal consultation, and simulation all pointed to the same conclusion: quick institutional actions can move early, but operational actions such as vessel records, information-sharing, CDS, joint MCS, and IUU monitoring require longer preparation and should not be launched as if they are single-step measures. Accordingly, the plan is structured in phases, with governance and readiness actions front-loaded and the more complex operational measures sequenced over time.
- ***Administrative readiness matters more than funding alone.*** The simulation showed that money by itself does not ensure implementation if inter-agency coordination, approvals, and follow-up are weak. The legal consultation similarly emphasized that the RPOA is a voluntary policy instrument whose effectiveness depends on how it is translated into domestic administrative action. Accordingly, the plan gives early emphasis to focal points, inter-agency mechanisms, consultations, reporting routines, and Secretariat follow-up.
- ***The RPOA is fundamentally a cooperation instrument, not a stand-alone enforcement mechanism.*** The webinar highlighted cooperation, trust-building, and regional learning as central to implementation, while the legal meeting stressed that BOBP-IGO does not exercise RFMO-type regulatory authority and must work through agreed national processes. Accordingly, the plan emphasizes coordination, harmonization, technical support, and gradual operationalization rather than immediate hard enforcement commitments.

BOBLME WORK PLAN: Background Materials

- **Data systems are the backbone of implementation.** The webinar repeatedly underscored the importance of vessel records, traceability, documentation, and information systems; the simulation likewise showed that the data-heavy actions are the main implementation risk if they are not built carefully. Accordingly, the plan treats vessel records, CDS, information-sharing, and IUU monitoring as a linked package and provides studies, workshops, technical design steps, and phased rollout for them.
- **Existing legal and administrative systems should be used first, and gaps addressed progressively.** The legal consultation made clear that implementation should begin with what can be undertaken under existing domestic frameworks, while also identifying and addressing legal, institutional, due process, and financial gaps for sustained implementation. Accordingly, the plan combines immediate activities under current mandates with studies, consultations, and review processes to support later strengthening.
- **Actions should not be measured as if they are all the same.** The simulation showed that threshold actions such as nomination or communication move differently from procedural actions such as CDS or joint MCS. Accordingly, the plan distinguishes between quick institutional actions and slower operational actions, and links activities to practical outputs rather than relying only on formal completion.
- **Capacity building and peer learning must be tied to real bottlenecks.** The webinar showed that other regions advanced through targeted technical exchange, standard-setting, and sustained support rather than generic awareness-building. Accordingly, the plan includes action-linked workshops, studies, consultations, and training—including the proposed Bangkok exposure visit on fisheries MCS—to solve concrete implementation problems.

3. Strategic Framing and Design Principles

- **Country ownership with regional guidance:** The RPOA-IUU shall progress through national processes, while the Secretariat provides convening, templates, technical backstopping, cross-country comparison, and selective regional pilots.
- **Progressive implementation:** Lower-cost institutional and procedural foundations should precede complex regional mechanisms such as a regional vessel record, catch documentation scheme, formal information-sharing, and joint MCS procedures.
- **Risk-based prioritisation:** Those actions that are most likely to stall under weak funding and weak administration should receive earlier design attention, clearer milestones, and stronger Secretariat follow-up.
- **Differentiated country pathways:** Implementation should not assume institutional symmetry. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh can be used more readily for piloting and scale-up; Maldives will benefit from narrower but complete modules; India requires a decomposed Centre-plus-State pathway.

4. Classification of Actions for Strategy Purposes

For implementation management, the twenty actions may be grouped as follows.

Action set	Strategic type	Implication for implementation strategy
[1] Adopt RPOA-IUU; [2] National Focal Points; [3] Stakeholder Notification	Threshold actions	These can usually be completed through formal decision, designation or notification. They should be achieved early, but should not be used as a proxy for deeper operational readiness.
[4] NPOA-IUU; [5] NPOA-MCS Review; [6] Policy Alignment; [8] Vessel Marking & IMO; [9] Port State Inspection Plans; [11] Gear Marking Standards; [13] Fish Product Classification; [15] Regional MCS Toolbox; [16] Inter-Agency Coordination	National system-building actions	These actions create the administrative, legal and technical base required for later regional operationalisation.
[7] Regional Vessel Record; [10] Joint MCS Procedures; [12] IUU Vessel List; [14] Catch Documentation Scheme; [17] Information Sharing Mechanism; [18] IUU Magnitude Monitoring	Regional backbone actions	These constitute the fragile operational spine of the RPOA-IUU. They are coordination-heavy, data-heavy and most likely to underperform under stressed scenarios.
[19] Technical Assistance; [20] Capacity Evaluation	Continuous enabling actions	These should run throughout the implementation period as support and feedback functions, not as one-off events.

5. Proposed Sequencing of Implementation

Phase I: Institutional foundation and mobilization (2025–2027)

Priority should be given to assignment of focal points, stakeholder notification, initiation of NPOA-IUU and NPOA-MCS review processes, establishment or formalisation of inter-agency coordination arrangements, and commencement of technical assistance and capacity evaluation. The purpose of Phase I is to create an administrative base without which later regional actions remain mostly symbolic.

Secretariat activities: Issue the Secretariat inception circular and action matrix to member-countries and focal points; support designation or confirmation of focal points and establish a contact roster, communication protocol and review calendar; prepare template packages for stakeholder notification, NPOA-IUU initiation, NPOA-MCS review, inter-agency coordination and

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baseline capacity capture; conduct bilateral consultations and convene the inaugural regional focal point meeting to agree near-term priorities, support needs and sequencing; and align FAO and partner technical assistance, consultant inputs and annual work plans to the Phase I agenda.

Outputs by end of phase: A consolidated focal point roster and communication protocol; country inception notes and a baseline implementation tracker; template package for notifications, review processes and inter-agency arrangements; record of the inaugural focal point meeting and agreed next steps; and a Phase I Secretariat support plan for 2026–2027.

Country interface: Member-countries should nominate empowered focal points and identify counterpart agencies, validate the baseline status and support needs, and confirm immediate priorities for Secretariat support.

Phase II: National system-building and harmonisation (2026–2028)

This phase should emphasise policy alignment, vessel marking and IMO-related steps, port State inspection planning, gear marking standards, product classification, and development of a regional MCS toolbox. These actions are still procedurally demanding, but they are more manageable than immediate regional operational integration.

Secretariat activities: Prepare model guidance notes, SOP outlines and technical concept papers for policy alignment, vessel marking, port State inspection planning, gear marking, product classification and the regional MCS toolbox; support national drafting workshops, technical clinics and peer-learning exchanges to adapt regional templates into country procedures; review draft national procedures and provide consolidated technical comments, including cross-country comparison of approaches and bottlenecks; coordinate with FAO and specialist partners on standards, metadata structures, training materials and quality assurance; and undertake a mid-term implementation review to identify which national systems are ready for later regional operationalisation.

Outputs by end of phase: A regional guidance and model SOP package for Phase II actions; country-specific adaptation roadmaps and draft procedures; training materials, workshop records and peer-learning notes; prototype regional MCS toolbox and pilot application reports; and a mid-term review note identifying readiness gaps and next-phase candidates.

Country interface: Member-countries should designate technical working teams, host drafting and validation events, and secure review, endorsement or issuance of the relevant national procedures by competent authorities.

Phase III: Regional operationalization and consolidation (2027–2030)

The regional vessel record, catch documentation, information-sharing arrangements, monitoring of IUU magnitude, joint MCS procedures, and a credible IUU vessel listing process should be taken up in staged fashion after sufficient national groundwork exists. These actions should move first through design and pilot stages, and only thereafter to wider regional roll-out.

Secretariat activities: Design and pilot the regional vessel record, information-sharing arrangements, catch documentation modules, IUU magnitude monitoring framework, joint MCS

procedure options and vessel-listing process in staged fashion; prepare draft governance arrangements, data-sharing protocols, eligibility criteria, metadata standards and operational manuals for backbone regional actions; facilitate pilot implementation among willing member-countries and document lessons before broader roll-out; conduct annual performance reviews, issue corrective action notes and recalibrate ambition where prerequisites remain weak; and consolidate evidence, mobilise additional technical assistance where required, and prepare the 2030 review and recommendations for the subsequent period.

Outputs by end of phase: Pilot protocols and governance documents for backbone regional actions; tested technical architecture and metadata structure for vessel record and information sharing; pilot CDS and monitoring methodologies with documented lessons and revision notes; draft criteria and process note for regional IUU vessel listing and joint procedure options; and an end-period regional implementation review with recommendations for the next phase.

Country interface: Member-countries should authorise pilot participation, designate data and enforcement counterparts, validate protocols and data fields, and decide on the conditions for wider regional application.

6. Suggested Secretariat Workstreams

Workstream 1: Governance and coordination: Maintain focal point engagement; convene reviews; prepare guidance notes; support inter-agency dialogue; escalate bottlenecks where political or administrative decisions are needed.

Workstream 2: Technical design and standards: Develop model templates, SOP outlines, technical concept notes, metadata structures and guidance packs for vessel records, port inspection plans, information-sharing, CDS and monitoring methods.

Workstream 3: Capacity development and peer learning: Deliver regional and national training, study visits, exposure to good practice, and country-to-country exchanges, with FAO and other technical partners contributing where appropriate.

Workstream 4: Monitoring and adaptive management: Track formal completion, operational readiness and functional use separately; undertake annual review; recalibrate country pathways and regional ambitions based on evidence.

7. Monitoring Architecture

The Secretariat should avoid a single undifferentiated implementation score. Monitoring should instead be carried out through three complementary lenses.

Lens	Meaning	Illustrative indicators
Formal completion	Whether an action has been officially designated, approved or notified.	Focal point issued; policy note approved; consultation held; guidance circulated.
Operational readiness	Whether the systems, procedures, legal anchors, people and tools are in place to use the action in practice.	SOP drafted; database structure agreed; officers trained; protocols cleared.

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Lens	Meaning	Illustrative indicators
Functional use	Whether the mechanism is actually being used and updated over time.	Inspections carried out; vessel data exchanged; CDS used on consignments; monitoring report produced periodically.

8. Risks and Trigger Points for Management Attention

- A delay in nominating and empowering focal points should trigger immediate Secretariat follow-up, as it undermines the entire coordination chain.
- A lack of progress in NPOA-IUU / NPOA-MCS review and inter-agency arrangements by the end of Phase I should trigger a reset of expectations for regional operational actions.
- If vessel records, port inspection planning, or information-sharing remain stalled, the Secretariat should avoid overpromising joint patrolling or full regional CDS roll-out.
- Under limited funding conditions, technical assistance and capacity evaluation should be protected rather than cut first, because these functions sustain system-building and reveal where recalibration is necessary.

9. Priority Actions for Immediate Secretariat Attention in 2026–2027

The indicative GanttChart for the implementation of the BOB RPOA IUU is provided in **Annex I**. The prioritized actions to be undertaken during 2026-27 are summarized below.

Priority set	Actions	Immediate Secretariat response
Institutional base	[2], [3], [4], [5], [16], [19], [20]	Maintain focal point contact, support consultations, provide templates, establish annual review protocol, and protect TA/capacity evaluation resources.
National operating systems	[6], [8], [9], [11], [13], [15]	Prepare model SOPs and guidance notes; support country-level adaptation; use pilots and peer review.
Fragile regional backbone	[7], [10], [12], [14], [17], [18]	Adopt pilot-first approach; do not pursue region-wide rollout until sufficient national readiness is demonstrated.

The detailed Action-wise Implementation Plan is summarized in **Annex II**. The Detailed Plan for Implementation of the BOB RPOA IUU is appended separately as a **DRAFT Working Document**.

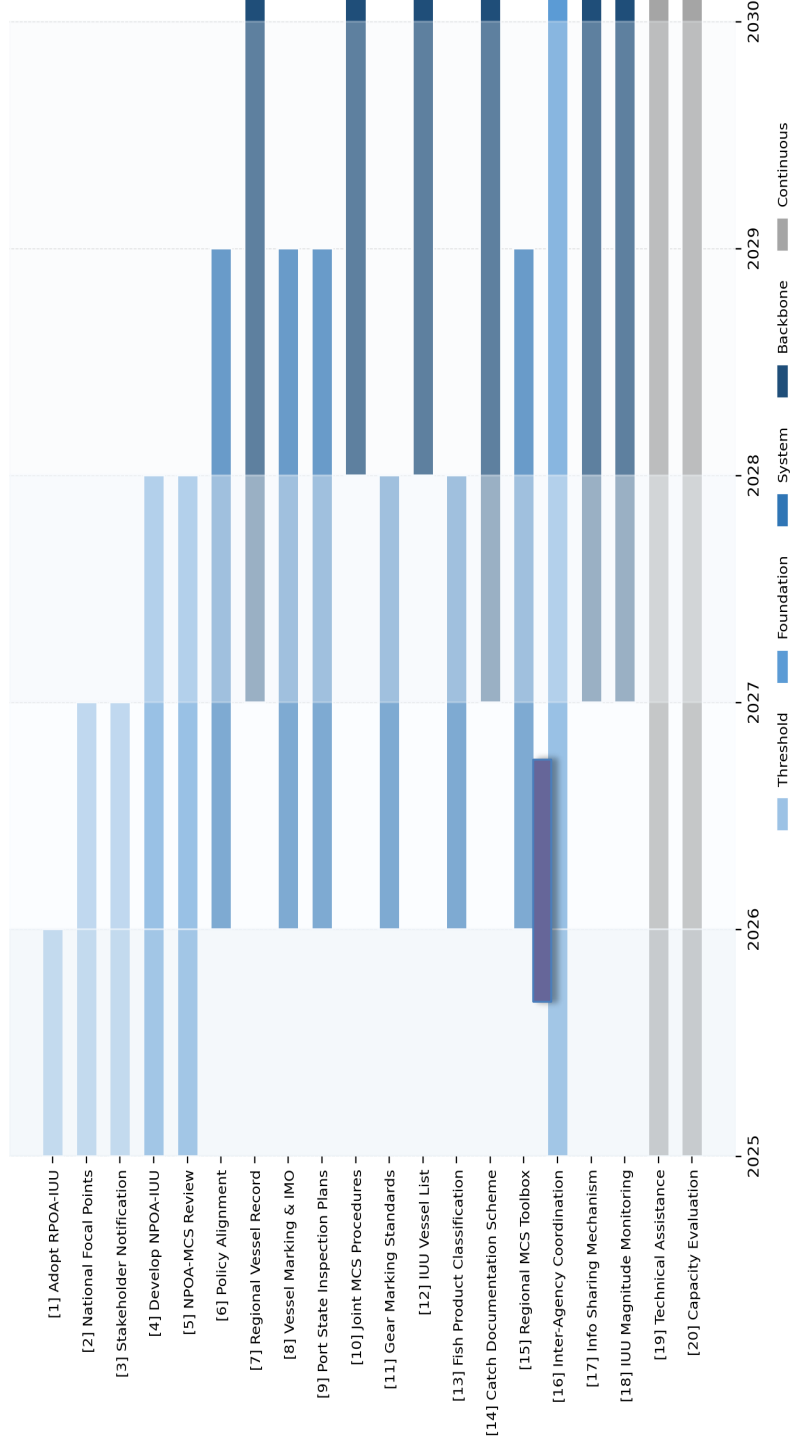
A large rectangular box containing 25 horizontal dotted lines, intended for writing a work plan.

Annexure I

Indicative Gantt Chart for Sequenced Implementation, 2025–2030

The chart below indicates the principal period of design, rollout and consolidation. It is indicative and should be revised after annual review and country consultation.

Indicative sequencing of the 20 BOB RPOA-IUU actions



Note: Threshold actions should be secured early, but the Secretariat should place primary management attention on the national system-building and regional backbone actions, which are more vulnerable under constrained scenarios.

Annexure I

Detailed Action-wise Implementation Plan

The following matrix expands each of the twenty actions into indicative Secretariat activities, the corresponding support required from member-countries, timeframe, activity type and output. *The activity typology used is: Study, Communication, Meeting, Workshop, Training program and Routine.*

Action 1. Review, consider and agree to the BOB RPOA-IUU and its implementation through BOBP-IGO

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Issue the formal Secretariat circular transmitting the adopted RPOA-IUU text, action matrix and proposed implementation calendar	Communication	Prepare and circulate the official communication package; attach the action matrix, indicative calendar and request for confirmation of national contact points.	Acknowledge receipt; confirm the competent ministry/agency and provide the official channel for subsequent coordination.	Q3 2026	Secretariat inception circular and action matrix issued to all member-countries.
Convene the inaugural Regional Focal Point Meeting to agree immediate priorities, sequencing and reporting arrangements	Meeting	Prepare agenda, background note and facilitation material; consolidate country queries; record decisions and follow-up actions.	Nominate participants with decision-making authority; share baseline status and priority support needs before the meeting.	Q4 2026	Record of decisions from the inaugural focal point meeting and agreed near-term workplan.
Maintain the master implementation tracker and submit annual roll-forward notes to BOBP-IGO governance mechanisms	Routine	Update the master tracker, compile country progress, flag bottlenecks and place implementation status before TAC/RPSC or equivalent review forums.	Provide periodic updates, validate country entries and respond to requests for clarification on implementation status.	2026-2030	Annual roll-forward note and updated implementation tracker.

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Action 2. Notify suitable national focal points and maintain effective inter-agency cooperation

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Request formal nomination or confirmation of national focal points and alternates	Communication	Send formal requests, follow up on pending nominations and maintain a standard template for focal point details and mandates.	Nominate focal points and alternates; indicate host institution, mandate, and inter-agency reach.	Q3-Q4 2026	Formal focal point roster for Bangladesh, India, Maldives and Sri Lanka.
Conduct bilateral onboarding meetings with focal agencies and clarify coordination protocol	Meeting	Hold country-by-country onboarding meetings; explain reporting expectations, support windows and escalation channels.	Ensure focal points and key counterpart agencies attend and validate the national coordination arrangement.	Q4 2026	Country onboarding notes and agreed coordination protocol.
Operate quarterly focal point check-ins and maintain the contact roster and communications log	Routine	Schedule quarterly virtual check-ins, circulate reminders, maintain the roster and capture follow-up actions in a communications log.	Attend quarterly check-ins, share progress and flag inter-agency or political bottlenecks requiring Secretariat support.	2026-2030	Updated roster, communications log and quarterly focal point follow-up record.

Action 3. Inform stakeholders and relevant regional/international organizations about adoption of the BOB RPOA-IUU

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Prepare a standard stakeholder communication package on the BOB RPOA-IUU	Communication	Draft model notification letters, briefing notes, slide deck, FAQs and web/social media text for country adaptation.	Review the draft package, translate or adapt where needed, and clear it for national use.	Q3 2026	Stakeholder communication package for country use.
Support country-level issuance of stakeholder notices and dissemination to partner agencies	Communication	Provide editorial support, compile mailing lists where possible and track dissemination coverage across stakeholder groups.	Issue national notices to fisheries agencies, ports, coast guard, customs, trade bodies, fishing associations and development partners.	Q1-Q2 2026	National dissemination record and country-level notification outputs.

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Convene a regional stakeholder briefing / webinar on implications of the RPOA-IUU	Meeting	Organise the regional briefing, present the implementation roadmap and capture stakeholder observations for action planning.	Nominate speakers/participants and provide short inputs on national priorities and implementation concerns.	Q2 2026	Regional stakeholder briefing note and compiled stakeholder observations.

Action 4. Develop and implement NPOA-IUU through stakeholder consultations and regular review

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake country baseline studies for NPOA-IUU preparation, covering legal, institutional and implementation status	Study	Prepare TORs, mobilise consultants/technical staff, provide regional framing and quality review of country baseline studies.	Share laws, policies, institutional maps and relevant ongoing initiatives; facilitate access to counterpart agencies and data.	Q1-Q2 2026	Country baseline studies for NPOA-IUU development.
Conduct national inception / consultation workshops on NPOA-IUU formulation	Workshop	Support agenda design, technical presentations and moderation; ensure regional and FAO guidance is reflected.	Host the workshop, invite cross-sector stakeholders and validate key problem statements and priorities.	Q2-Q3 2026	National consultation workshop reports and agreed drafting directions.
Run bilateral drafting clinics and review meetings on draft NPOA-IUU documents	Meeting	Review draft texts, provide comparative comments and help resolve issues related to scope, legal references and action sequencing.	Nominate drafting teams, share revised drafts on time and convene internal consultations with competent ministries.	Q3 2026-Q2 2027	Reviewed national draft NPOA-IUU documents.
Support national validation workshops and issuance / endorsement processes	Workshop	Prepare validation materials, participate in final review and assist countries in packaging documents for approval or issuance.	Complete final national consultation, secure validation and pursue formal approval/issuance through the competent authority.	Q3 2027-Q2 2028	Validated and, where possible, issued / endorsed NPOA-IUU documents.

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Action 5. Review and implement National Plans of Action on Monitoring, Control and Surveillance (NPOA-MCS)

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Carry out a national MCS stocktake and review of existing NPOA-MCS provisions, capacities and gaps	Study	Develop common review template and TORs; support country assessments and compare results across member-countries.	Provide existing NPOA-MCS documents, MCS institutional information, operational procedures and enforcement statistics where available.	Q1-Q2 2026	Country MCS stocktake notes and review matrix.
Hold a regional technical workshop on methodology for NPOA-MCS review and harmonisation	Workshop	Prepare concept note and common review questions; facilitate peer exchange on MCS design, safety-at-sea and OSH integration.	Nominate technical participants and present current MCS arrangements, reform priorities and implementation constraints.	Q3 2026	Regional technical workshop report and harmonisation checklist.
Conduct country review meetings to revise national MCS action plans and implementation roadmaps	Meeting	Provide comments on country roadmaps, facilitate problem-solving and track cross-country consistency on core MCS elements.	Convene national review teams, revise the roadmap and identify approvals/resources required for implementation.	Q4 2026-Q3 2027	Updated national MCS review roadmaps.
Compile a consolidated regional note on NPOA-MCS review outcomes and priority support needs	Routine	Synthesize country results, identify common support needs and align them with Secretariat/FAO annual work planning.	Validate the synthesis note and confirm national priority support requests for the following period.	Q4 2027	Regional synthesis note on NPOA-MCS review and priority support needs.

Action 6. Align national policies with a common regional objective

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Prepare a comparative policy study on alignment issues including flag-hopping, vessel identification and unmonitored trans-shipment	Study	Commission/manage the study, define comparison parameters and circulate a regional options note for discussion.	Provide legal texts, policy instruments and administrative practice notes; nominate legal/technical reviewers.	Q3 2026-Q1 2027	Comparative policy alignment study and options note.

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Convene a regional legal and policy dialogue among fisheries, maritime and enforcement authorities	Meeting	Organise the dialogue, structure the agenda around actionable items and capture areas requiring national follow-up.	Nominate legal, fisheries and enforcement representatives empowered to discuss practical policy alignment options.	Q1 2027	Regional policy dialogue record and agreed follow-up matrix.
Support national inter-ministerial workshops / consultations on policy alignment measures	Workshop	Provide model issues paper and facilitate country workshops on policy alignment priorities and sequencing.	Host national consultations with relevant ministries/agencies and identify feasible short-, medium- and long-term alignment measures.	Q2-Q4 2027	Country policy alignment workshop records and national action notes.
Maintain a follow-up matrix on agreed alignment measures and unresolved policy issues	Routine	Track policy follow-up, monitor decisions and table unresolved issues for higher-level consideration where needed.	Provide periodic status updates on policy actions and advise where Secretariat escalation or technical support is required.	2028-2029	Policy alignment follow-up matrix and periodic status notes.

Action 7. Establish and maintain a Regional Record of Fishing Vessels

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake a feasibility and system design study for the Regional Vessel Record, including metadata and interoperability needs	Study	Prepare TORs, coordinate specialist inputs and ensure the design reflects member-country vessel realities and FAO Global Record compatibility.	Provide registry structures, key data fields, vessel categories and constraints related to data access and disclosure.	Q1-Q3 2027	Feasibility and system design study for the Regional Vessel Record.
Convene a technical meeting on data fields, eligibility criteria, governance and exchange protocol	Meeting	Facilitate technical discussion, table draft data standards and capture country positions on governance and sharing arrangements.	Nominate registry/data officers and clarify legal/administrative limits on data sharing and updating responsibilities.	Q4 2027	Agreed draft data field list and governance questions for pilot development.

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Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Run a pilot data submission, data cleaning and interoperability exercise among willing member-countries	Routine	Prepare pilot templates, validate data submissions and document practical issues in matching formats and minimum fields.	Submit sample/pilot data, designate focal technical staff and respond to data validation queries.	2028	Pilot vessel record dataset and data-cleaning report.
Hold a regional validation workshop and issue a roll-out note for staged expansion	Workshop	Present pilot results, propose adjustments and prepare the staged roll-out note for approval/endorsement.	Review pilot findings, confirm readiness conditions and identify national steps required before wider participation.	Q1-Q2 2029	Regional validation workshop report and staged roll-out note.

Action 8. Ensure marking and identification of fishing vessels and eligible vessels obtain IMO numbers

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake national inventory and eligibility assessments for vessel marking and related requirements	Study	Provide assessment template and technical guidance on vessel categories, thresholds and priority fleet segments.	Share registry/licensing data, identify eligible vessel segments and nominate registry/licensing counterparts.	Q2-Q4 2026	Country inventory and eligibility assessment notes.
Issue regional guidance and communication package on vessel marking and IMO-related implementation steps	Communication	Prepare concise guidance note, FAQ and implementation checklists for licensing and registry authorities.	Review and adapt the package to national procedures and issue national instructions where feasible.	Q1 2027	Regional guidance package on vessel marking and IMO-related steps.
Conduct national implementation workshops for registry, licensing and enforcement officers	Workshop	Support country workshops, explain technical steps and document issues requiring cross-country clarification.	Host workshops, nominate competent officers and identify procedural bottlenecks requiring follow-up.	Q1-Q3 2027	National implementation workshop reports and action lists.
Track progress, troubleshoot implementation problems and issue periodic follow-up notes	Routine	Maintain an implementation log, respond to technical queries and consolidate recurring issues for regional discussion.	Provide updates on applications, registrations, field implementation and enforcement issues.	2028-2030	Periodic follow-up notes and implementation troubleshooting log.

Action 9. Develop national inspection plans and SOPs regarding Port State Measures

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Carry out port inspection capacity and legal diagnostics in member-countries	Study	Develop common diagnostic framework; support country assessments on ports, legal powers, staffing and inspection workflows.	Provide port lists, legal provisions, inspection arrangements and counterpart contacts from port/fisheries/customs agencies.	Q3 2026-Q1 2027	Country diagnostics on port inspection capacity and legal arrangements.
Organise a regional workshop on model inspection plans and SOPs in line with PSMA minimum standards	Workshop	Prepare model framework, technical sessions and comparative country presentations on inspection planning.	Nominate fisheries, port, customs and enforcement officers; present current practice and review the model framework.	Q2 2027	Regional workshop report and model inspection plan / SOP framework.
Support national drafting meetings to adapt the model inspection plan and SOPs	Meeting	Review national drafts, provide technical comments and maintain cross-country consistency on minimum content.	Convene national drafting teams and clear the draft through relevant authorities for testing/approval.	Q2-Q4 2027	Country draft inspection plans and SOPs.
Conduct inspector and supervisor training on implementation of the plans and SOPs	Training program	Design training modules, mobilise resource persons and document training outcomes and follow-up needs.	Nominate inspectors/supervisors and host field-linked training sessions where feasible.	Q1-Q2 2028	Trained cohort of inspectors/supervisors and training completion note.

Action 10. Consider establishment of joint regional MCS and enforcement procedures

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Prepare a scoping study on feasible joint MCS options, including hotlines, coordinated patrol windows, observer exchanges and tabletop procedures	Study	Commission and guide the scoping study with a pragmatic focus on legally and politically feasible cooperation steps.	Share existing bilateral/regional practice, legal constraints and operational preferences for staged cooperation.	Q2-Q4 2027	Scoping study on feasible joint MCS options.

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Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Convene an enforcement coordination meeting among focal agencies to discuss feasible procedural options	Meeting	Prepare issues paper, moderate the discussion and capture matters requiring legal, policy or operational follow-up.	Nominate fisheries, coast guard/naval, maritime and enforcement representatives with operational knowledge.	Q1 2028	Enforcement coordination meeting record and shortlist of feasible joint procedures.
Hold a regional SOP drafting workshop / tabletop exercise on selected joint procedure options	Workshop	Develop draft SOP elements, simulation scenarios and facilitation material; capture lessons for revision.	Participate in the tabletop exercise, test the SOP logic and provide comments on operational feasibility.	Q2 2028	Draft SOP note and tabletop exercise report.
Pilot limited coordinated operations or exchange of patrol information among willing countries	Routine	Coordinate pilot windows, document lessons and propose adjustments before any broader roll-out.	Authorise pilot participation, identify operational focal points and provide feedback on the pilot experience.	2029-2030	Pilot note on coordinated operations / information exchange and lessons learned.

Action 11. Comply with international standards on gear marking

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Review current gear marking practices, legal provisions and implementation gaps	Study	Prepare review template, support country assessments and compare national readiness against FAO guidance.	Provide legal texts, ongoing initiatives and field information on fishing gears, marking practice and enforcement issues.	Q1-Q2 2027	Country review notes on gear marking practice and gaps.
Conduct consultation workshops with fishers, industry and relevant agencies on practical gear marking options	Workshop	Support workshop design and facilitation to ensure practical issues, cost concerns and compliance realities are discussed.	Host the workshop, mobilise representative stakeholders and capture consensus points and concerns.	Q3 2027	Consultation workshop reports on gear marking options.
Prepare and disseminate communication materials and a simple marking manual	Communication	Draft manual, communication products and outreach messages for field use and adaptation by countries.	Review, adapt and circulate the materials through national channels and field	Q4 2027	Gear marking manual and communication materials.

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Support pilot implementation and monitoring in selected fisheries / landing centres	Routine	Track pilot application, compile lessons and advise on adjustments before wider rollout.	Identify pilot sites, coordinate local implementation and report operational issues and compliance responses.	2028-2029	Pilot implementation note and monitoring summary.

Action 12. Establish and maintain a list of vessels presumed and/or confirmed to have carried out IUU fishing

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake a study on listing criteria, due process safeguards and linkage with national law / RFMO practice	Study	Commission the study, define fair-process questions and prepare an options note tailored to the region.	Provide legal information, current listing practice and views on evidence thresholds, appeal and disclosure issues.	Q1-Q3 2028	Study on regional vessel listing criteria and due process options.
Convene a legal-technical consultation meeting on the design of a regional vessel listing process	Meeting	Organise the consultation, present options and capture areas of comfort and concern among member-countries.	Nominate legal, fisheries and enforcement representatives to discuss evidence, fairness and practical administration.	Q4 2028	Legal-technical consultation record on vessel listing process.
Prepare a draft regional process note and provisional exchange protocol for candidate cases	Routine	Draft the process note, circulate for comment and maintain a controlled exchange protocol for pilot handling of candidate cases.	Review the draft process note, identify national legal issues and designate case-handling counterparts where appropriate.	Q1-Q2 2029	Draft process note and provisional exchange protocol.
Hold annual review meetings on candidate cases, safeguards and next steps	Meeting	Prepare anonymised or case-based materials as appropriate and facilitate annual review of process and safeguards.	Provide views on candidate cases/process issues and decide whether conditions exist for further operationalisation.	2029-2030	Annual review record on vessel-listing process and safeguards.

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Action 13. Adopt international best practices for classification of fish and fishery products

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Prepare a study on fish product classification issues, trade control needs and national practice	Study	Commission/manage the study and compare classification systems, bottlenecks and opportunities for improved control.	Provide customs/trade/fisheries practice notes, HS code usage issues and product lists of national significance.	Q1-Q2 2027	Study on fish product classification and control issues.
Conduct a technical workshop with customs, trade and fisheries agencies	Workshop	Organise the workshop, present the study and facilitate discussion on classification improvements and practical steps.	Nominate technical participants from fisheries, customs, standards and trade authorities and review proposed options.	Q3 2027	Technical workshop report and agreed follow-up actions.
Issue guidance notes and communication material on improved classification practice	Communication	Prepare concise guidance, examples and communication material for administrative use and awareness.	Review/adapt the notes and circulate them through competent authorities.	Q4 2027	Classification guidance notes and communication outputs.
Maintain routine country follow-up on use issues, updates and refinements	Routine	Track implementation issues, collect examples and update guidance as needed through periodic correspondence.	Provide feedback on operational issues, emerging products and refinement needs.	2028-2030	Periodic implementation notes on product classification issues.

Action 14. Develop a harmonised catch documentation scheme consistent with the FAO VGCDS

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Carry out a feasibility, risk and sequencing study for a regional catch documentation scheme	Study	Develop TORs and oversight for the study; ensure a risk-based approach on priority species/products and supply chains.	Provide information on exports, certification systems, traceability arrangements and administrative constraints.	Q1 2027-Q1 2028	Feasibility, risk and sequencing study for a regional CDS.

Work-plan for BOB RPOA-IUU

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Hold a regional design workshop on priority species/products, data flow and competent authority roles	Workshop	Prepare design options, facilitate discussion and document areas suitable for pilot implementation.	Nominate fisheries, trade/export, certification and enforcement representatives and review practical design options.	Q2 2028	Regional design workshop report and pilot design directions.
Conduct pilot design meetings with selected countries and priority supply chains	Meeting	Provide detailed technical follow-up, review pilot design notes and align data requirements with country readiness.	Confirm pilot participation, identify priority supply chains and nominate competent authority counterparts.	Q3 2028-Q1 2029	Pilot design notes for selected countries / supply chains.
Deliver training for competent authorities, verifiers and affected industry actors	Training program	Prepare training modules, resource persons and practical exercises linked to the pilot design.	Nominate trainees from competent authorities and relevant industry/export bodies; host or support the training where needed.	Q2-Q3 2029	Trained cohort for CDS pilot implementation.
Support pilot implementation and review of the CDS in selected settings	Routine	Monitor pilot use, compile lessons and recommend adjustments before wider application.	Implement the pilot in agreed settings, provide data/feedback and identify legal or administrative issues needing resolution.	Q4 2029-Q4 2030	CDS pilot review note and recommendations for next-phase rollout.

Action 15. Develop and utilise a regional MCS toolbox

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Commission a regional study compiling MCS tools, standards, technologies and good practices relevant to member-countries	Study	Prepare TORs, mobilise expertise and shape the study toward practical tools usable by member-countries with varying capacities.	Provide information on tools currently used, constraints, preferences and examples requiring further examination.	Q3 2026-Q1 2027	Regional study on MCS tools, standards and good practices.

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Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Organise the Exposure Visit on fisheries MCS in Thailand, Bangkok	Training program	Coordinate concept, programme, host liaison, participant selection criteria, logistics and post-visit reporting with FAO/Thai counterparts as appropriate.	Nominate participants, process travel clearances and ensure returning participants prepare a brief on applicability to their national context.	Jan 2027	Completed exposure visit in Bangkok and post-visit learning note.
Convene a regional workshop on toolbox structure, minimum modules and country use cases	Workshop	Present study findings and exposure visit lessons; facilitate agreement on the toolbox architecture and priority modules.	Nominate technical participants and present priority use cases and institutional constraints from each country.	Q2 2027	Workshop report and agreed architecture for the regional MCS toolbox.
Publish Toolbox Version 1 and maintain periodic updates based on country feedback and new practice	Communication	Edit, package and disseminate the toolbox; maintain version control and periodic updates as practice evolves.	Review the draft toolbox, nominate users/testers and share feedback for Version 1 and later revisions.	Q4 2027; updates 2028-2030	Regional MCS Toolbox Version 1 and subsequent update notes.

Action 16. Establish formal collaboration and coordination mechanism among relevant agencies

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake a country institutional mapping and coordination diagnostic	Study	Provide a common diagnostic framework, support country mapping and identify coordination bottlenecks and overlap areas.	Share organograms, mandates, coordination arrangements and institutional constraints involving fisheries, ports, maritime, customs and enforcement bodies.	Q1-Q2 2026	Country institutional mapping and coordination diagnostic notes.
Facilitate national inter-agency coordination meetings to clarify roles and channels	Meeting	Support agenda setting, moderation and documentation of coordination arrangements and outstanding issues.	Convene the relevant agencies nationally and identify practical actions, focal roles and unresolved matters for follow-up.	Q2-Q4 2026	National inter-agency meeting records and agreed action points.

Work-plan for BOB RPOA-IUU

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Hold a regional workshop on coordination models, mandates and practical lessons	Workshop	Compile country experiences, organise peer exchange and identify adaptable coordination models and minimum functions.	Nominate inter-agency representatives and share experience from national coordination efforts.	Q1 2027	Regional workshop report on inter-agency coordination models.
Maintain quarterly coordination calls and annual review of inter-agency functionality	Routine	Schedule follow-up calls, maintain a coordination issues log and review whether national mechanisms remain active and useful.	Participate in calls, update the Secretariat on coordination practice and seek support where inter-agency issues persist.	2027-2030	Quarterly coordination records and annual functionality review notes.

Action 17. Develop a regional mechanism for effective information sharing and cooperation to combat IUU fishing

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Prepare a requirements study for a regional information-sharing mechanism	Study	Define the scope of the study, review models from other regions and identify minimum viable options suited to member-country readiness.	Provide information on current sharing practice, legal/confidentiality constraints and priority data needs.	Q3 2026-Q1 2028	Requirements study for regional information sharing.
Convene a technical meeting on protocol, data fields, confidentiality and escalation procedures	Meeting	Facilitate technical discussion, table protocol options and document comfort levels and constraints across member-countries.	Nominate data, legal and enforcement counterparts and indicate issues related to confidentiality, disclosure and verification.	Q2 2028	Technical meeting record and draft protocol elements.
Support a pilot information-sharing arrangement among willing member-countries	Routine	Prepare pilot templates, monitor exchanges and document lessons on timeliness, utility and safeguards.	Confirm pilot participation, designate technical contacts and implement agreed pilot exchanges or verification requests.	Q3 2028-Q4 2029	Pilot information-sharing record and lessons note.

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Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Conduct user training / simulation exercise on the agreed information-sharing protocol	Training program	Develop scenarios and training materials; facilitate simulation of requests, verification and response pathways.	Nominate users and participate in the exercise with operational and legal counterparts.	Q1 2029	Simulation exercise report and trained user cohort.

Action 18. Monitor regularly the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing in the BOBP-IGO region

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Commission a baseline study and methodology note on estimating the magnitude and impact of IUU fishing	Study	Prepare TORs, guide methodological scope and align the work with evolving FAO guidance and available regional data realities.	Provide available national data, studies and institutional points of contact relevant to estimation methods and indicators.	Q2 2027-Q1 2028	Baseline study and methodology note on IUU magnitude monitoring.
Hold a regional technical workshop on indicators, data needs and estimation methods	Workshop	Present methodological options, facilitate peer review and identify a practical phased approach to monitoring.	Nominate fisheries, statistics, MCS and research counterparts and review the proposed methods and data requirements.	Q2 2028	Regional technical workshop report on IUU magnitude monitoring.
Run national data compilation and trial estimation cycles	Routine	Provide templates, technical advice and quality review during trial estimation cycles and compilation of country inputs.	Compile agreed data, coordinate among agencies and report practical issues affecting estimation quality or frequency.	Q3 2028-Q4 2029	Trial estimation outputs and country data compilation notes.
Convene a regional review meeting on the first estimates and methodological refinements	Meeting	Synthesize trial results, table refinement issues and agree on next-phase monitoring arrangements.	Review the initial results, comment on methodological practicality and support refinement of monitoring arrangements.	Q1 2030	Regional review note on first estimates and methodological refinements.

Action 19. Call for technical assistance and provide support to member-countries

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Undertake a technical assistance needs assessment and prepare a consolidated support pipeline	Study	Develop a common needs template, consolidate requests and align potential support windows with the RPOA action sequence.	Identify national support needs, rank priorities and provide information on existing assistance and gaps.	Q3-Q4 2026; annual refresh	Consolidated technical assistance pipeline.
Convene partner / donor coordination meetings to align support around priority actions	Meeting	Prepare briefing materials, share priority needs and coordinate with FAO and other partners to reduce duplication and gaps.	Validate priority needs and participate in discussions where national positioning or commitment is required.	Q3 2026; annually 2027-2030	Partner coordination meeting records and support alignment notes.
Deliver targeted advisory missions, workshops and training in response to approved priorities	Training program	Mobilise experts, package country support and document outputs from advisory missions and training activities.	Nominate beneficiaries, provide logistical support and follow up on agreed recommendations after support is delivered.	2026-2030	Completed technical assistance missions and training outputs.
Prepare annual technical assistance progress notes and resource mobilisation briefs	Routine	Track delivery against the pipeline, identify unmet needs and prepare briefs for resource mobilisation and reprogramming.	Provide implementation feedback on assistance received and confirm continuing / emerging needs.	2026-2030	Annual TA progress note and resource mobilisation brief.

Action 20. Address shortcomings and enhance capacity based on periodic evaluation of performance

Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Develop a capacity evaluation framework and baseline scorecard for the RPOA-IUU	Study	Prepare the framework, indicators and scoring guidance with enough simplicity for repeated use across member-countries.	Review the framework, validate indicators and provide baseline information for scoring.	Q2-Q4 2026	Capacity evaluation framework and baseline scorecard.
Conduct annual country self-assessments and bilateral review meetings	Meeting	Circulate the scorecard, review submissions bilaterally and identify follow-up actions for the subsequent work cycle.	Complete self-assessments, nominate review counterparts and agree on the corrective and support actions arising.	2027-2030	Annual country self-assessment and bilateral review notes.

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Activity	Type	Secretariat role	Support needed from member-countries	Timeframe	Indicative output
Hold a regional workshop on lessons, corrective actions and readiness for next-phase actions	Workshop	Compile evaluation findings, organise peer exchange and link lessons to annual planning and re-sequencing decisions.	Participate in the workshop, validate findings and agree on corrective actions and revised priorities.	Q1 2028	Regional lessons workshop report and corrective action note.
Undertake an end-period independent review and prepare a forward strategy note for the post-2030 period	Study	Prepare TORs, manage the review and consolidate recommendations into a forward strategy note for governance consideration.	Provide data, documents and access to counterparts for the review and comment on draft findings/recommendations.	Q1-Q4 2030	End-period independent review and forward strategy note.



Sub-Regional Consultation on Development of BOBLME Project Work Plan: 2026-27

16-17 April 2026 | Fortune Beach Resort, Chennai

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SESSION 4 (B)

Digital Traceability as a IUU Mitigation and Value Chain and Catch Documentation Framework

Technical Solution for Small-scale Fisheries Value Chain

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1. The Context

Traceability in fisheries refers to the ability to access information about a fish product at every stage of its supply chain through recorded identification. This extends from the point of capture to the final consumer, encompassing vessel and catch data, processing records, and trade documentation. For traceability to function, each movement and transformation in the supply chain must be systematically recorded, enabling both forward and backward tracking of any product and its attributes: species, weight, form, catch date and location, cold chain history, and processing method.

For traceability to work, all changes and movements in the supply chain must be recorded, either directly or indirectly. If this is done properly, it becomes possible to trace an item backward to its source or forward to where it went next. It also allows us to know important details about that item and related items, such as when and where they were created, their weight or volume, their form, species, fat content, salt content, and other relevant characteristics.

The primary driver for the intensification of traceability requirements is the persistence of illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. For small-scale communities, the impact is particularly devastating, as IUU operators often encroach on near-shore waters, depleting stocks that are vital for local food security.

The European Union (EU) and the United States have pioneered the use of market-access measures to enforce traceability. The EU's IUU Regulation (Regulation 1005/2008) and the subsequent 2024 Fisheries Control Regulation represent the most stringent mandatory regimes in existence. Starting in January 2024, the EU began a transition toward "full digitalization" of its monitoring systems. This shift significantly impacts small-scale operators because it extends digital tracking requirements to the entire EU fleet, including vessels under 12 meters in length.

Under the revised rules, every fishing vessel regardless of size must be equipped with a tracking device that transmits positional data. Furthermore, paper-based logbooks are being phased out in favour of electronic catch reporting for every fishing trip. For importers, the use of the "CATCH" IT tool becomes mandatory on January 9, 2026, creating a paperless workflow for the submission and verification of catch certificates. The EU's approach is predicated on the belief that a level playing field can only be achieved when every participant in the supply chain is subject to the same digital standards.

The United States implements its traceability mandate through the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP). SIMP focuses on 13 priority species identified as being at high risk for fraud or IUU fishing. Unlike the EU's comprehensive vessel-tracking mandate, SIMP allows for a degree of flexibility for small-scale vessels (defined as 12 meters or less, or 20 gross tons or less). Importers are permitted to provide aggregated harvest data from a single collection point for these small vessels, rather than individual harvest reports. This reflects a pragmatic recognition by US authorities of the logistical challenges inherent in artisanal landings. However, the importer remains responsible for the accuracy of the data and must maintain chain-of-custody records from harvest to the US border.

Currently, BOBP-IGO is implementing Phase II of the BOBLME project, funded by GEF and NORAD and implemented by FAO, which includes a dedicated component on catch documentation, and digital traceability across the four BOBP-IGO member countries: Bangladesh, India, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. This region is characterised by the small-scale nature of the fisheries. However, applying traceability within small-scale fisheries requires careful attention to a persistent tension between top-down compliance mandates and the informal, largely unrecorded nature of

artisanal fishing practice. The digital divide in coastal and rural areas, low digital literacy, and structural barriers faced by women compound this challenge considerably.

2. Figuring out Traceability: Building on Regional Consultations

The need for enhancing traceability system in the marine fisheries sector developed over a series of workshop on fisheries value chain conducted during 2025-26. While many individual and institutional efforts have been undertaken to pilot catch documentation, post-harvest improvement, and digital market linkages in the region, the evidence generated was not been systematically documented, and the practical lessons have not been adequately translated into implementable programme designs.

To build on this foundation, BOBP-IGO organised a structured sequence of four consultations between December 2025 and March 2026, each designed to generate specific empirical findings that would inform the regional programme.

Regional Workshop on Sustainable Aquatic Food Value Chains in Asia

BOBP-IGO, jointly with FAO, organised the Regional Workshop on Strengthening Sustainable Aquatic Food Value Chains for Enhanced Food Security and Nutrition in Asia at Chennai from 02–04 December 2025. The workshop brought together national delegations from eleven countries and established the analytical framework for this initiative. It confirmed that traceability should not be treated as a standalone digital compliance requirement but embedded within the broader continuum of value-chain development, and documented cross-cutting findings across member states: post-harvest losses of 15–60% across Asia; weak cold-chain infrastructure; gender inequalities that render the majority of the post-harvest workforce invisible to formal systems; and compliance and traceability gaps that limit market access for small-scale actors.



FAO–BOBP-IGO Regional Workshop on Aquatic Food Value Chains, Chennai, December 2025.

During the consultation, participants strongly opined that the failure to link traceability systems to direct operational benefits for fishers improved prices, transparent settlement, and access to welfare schemes was the primary cause of limited adoption. Regional collaboration was identified as essential for harmonising standards and accelerating progress toward sustainable, inclusive, and nutrition-secure aquatic food systems in Asia.

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Regional Workshop on Sustainable Indian Marine Ingredients

On 11 February 2026, BOBP-IGO co-organised the Regional Workshop on Fostering Stewardship for Sustainable Indian Marine Ingredients at the World Seafood Congress in Chennai, the first dedicated multi-stakeholder dialogue on India's fishmeal and fish oil sector. The discussions confirmed that India's approximately 72 fish meal manufacturing units, producing nearly 500,000 tonnes annually and generating an estimated ₹3,200–4,100 crore, are a structural link in the compliance chain for seafood exports: traceability gaps in marine ingredients not only threaten ingredient exports directly but also jeopardise the compliance credentials of shrimp exports, since the aquafeed inputs cannot be verified. A strong consensus emerged around the need for collective action across the value chain, supported by stronger traceability systems aligned with the forthcoming GDST marine ingredients module.



BOBP-IGO-Dakshin Foundation Regional Workshop on Fostering Stewardship for Sustainable Indian Marine Ingredients, February 2026

International Workshop on Upgrading Marine Fisheries Value Chain in the BOB Region

Building on this foundation, BOBP-IGO conducted a dedicated value chain study in Puducherry, culminating in the International Workshop on Upgrading Marine Fisheries Value Chain in the Bay of Bengal Region (Puducherry, 12–13 February 2026), organised in partnership with the Environmental Defense India Foundation (EDIF) and the Government of Puducherry, and in technical cooperation with FAO. Puducherry was selected as a model system representative of India's east coast small-scale fisheries, with marine production close to five lakh metric tonnes annually from a 45-km coastline, yet post-harvest losses of 20–52 percent driven by inadequate cold chain infrastructure. The study found that approximately 60 percent of ice supply is imported from neighbouring Tamil Nadu districts; that only two traders in the entire district connect 140 mechanised trawlers to export markets, limiting price discovery; and that Karaikal harbour designed for 100 vessels now handles 340, causing quality-degrading unloading delays. Stakeholders across all segments consistently prioritised infrastructure activation landing jetties, ice plants, cold storage over production increases, confirming that the binding constraint is value capture, not catch volume. Women vendors reported being forced into end-of-day distress sales due to the absence of cold storage at village markets.



BOBP-FAO-EDIF Workshop on Upgrading Fisheries Value Chain, Puducherry, February 2026

National Workshop on Operationalising National Framework on Traceability in Fisheries

The National Workshop on Operationalising the National Framework on Traceability in Fisheries and Aquaculture (MPEDA, Kochi, 5 March 2026), organised by BOBP-IGO in collaboration with EDIF and hosted by MPEDA, examined India's traceability readiness in depth and reviewed global experiences, including Indonesia's GDST-aligned Stelina platform and the transformation of the red grouper fishery in Mexico through blockchain-enabled traceability. Pilot Design Lab breakout groups drawing on exporters, marine ingredient sector representatives, fisher organisations, and technology providers converged on four design principles: a combined species-based and geography-based rollout starting at export-oriented landing centres; a shared-cost model with tangible incentives flowing to fishers; a modular, interoperable digital architecture allowing diverse software providers to build on common protocols; and a Fishers-First principle requiring that systems address operational needs rather than function solely as compliance instruments.

The workshop concluded with a consensus that the critical gap lies in converting the national traceability policy provisions into bankable, investment-ready project proposals and that BOBP-IGO is well positioned to contribute to this process.



National Workshop on Operationalising the Traceability Framework in Fisheries, March 2026

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Knowledge and Technical partner for Strengthening Fisheries Value Chain under PM-MKSSY

BOBP-IGO has additionally been functioning as a knowledge and technical partner under the *Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)* framework, India's flagship fisheries development scheme with a World Bank and AFD-backed outlay of ₹6,000 crore. The scheme aims to strengthen the fisheries value chain.

BOBP-IGO is assisting the programme in terms of building capacity for assessing value chain losses, documenting good practising notes (GPNs) and promoting entrepreneurial interventions to strengthen fisheries value chain in India.

The learnings will be shared to the member countries in the region – to build on existing institutional mechanisms to reduce food loss and strengthen value chain.

Key Lessons learned from the Workshops are:

- **The first-mile data gap is the defining structural constraint.** Across all four consultations, the same finding recurred: India's seafood supply chain has relatively mature documentation at the processing, certification, and export end, but the data chain breaks at its most critical point the vessel and the landing centre. A catch certificate that cannot be linked to a verifiable vessel-level landing record has no reliable claim to legal origin. Investments in downstream documentation, however sophisticated, cannot substitute for reliable data generation at the origin point.
- **Fisher adoption is determined by operational value, not compliance obligation.** The Kochi workshop was unambiguous: if a traceability system does not solve a problem that fishers already have opaque crew settlement, disputed auction prices, uncertainty about market conditions, difficulty accessing welfare schemes adoption will remain negligible regardless of regulations. The Mexico red grouper experience demonstrated the converse: where traceability was anchored in a programme that visibly raised prices, communities adopted it voluntarily and sustained it over years.
- **Infrastructure failures undermine traceability more than technology absence.** The Puducherry study documented that ice plants exist but are non-functional; harbour infrastructure was designed for a third of its current load; and women vendors use contaminated recycled ice. These are governance and investment failures, not technology failures. Any digital system deployed in such conditions must function reliably within them and must generate the data record that justifies the infrastructure investments needed to address them.
- **The market structure problem is as significant as the data problem.** The Puducherry value chain study found that only two traders in the entire district determine prices for 140 mechanised trawlers a market structure failure enabled by information asymmetry. Fishers are price-takers regardless of catch quality or quantity. An AI-based price intelligence system that makes auction data visible to fishers before landing is a more direct intervention in fisher welfare than any compliance documentation system; these two functions are best delivered by the same data infrastructure.
- **Women's exclusion from traceability systems produces an incomplete value chain record.** Women account for more than 80 percent of workers in fish marketing, curing, processing, and peeling in India, yet they operate in informal channels with manual

documentation, limited digital access, and languages that digital systems typically do not support. A traceability system that misses the majority of the post-harvest workforce cannot generate reliable information about what happens to fish between landing and retail. Inclusive design is therefore not an equity add-on; it is a condition for data completeness.

- **Marine ingredients traceability is a compliance prerequisite for seafood exports, not a secondary concern.** Fishmeal and fish oil from India's small pelagic fisheries are direct inputs into the shrimp aquaculture supply chain. A traceability programme that documents shrimp from farm to export container but cannot account for the feed inputs will fail compliance audits. The GDST marine ingredients module, expected in July 2026, will create standardised traceability requirements for this sector India must be positioned to engage from the outset.
- **Interoperability matters more than any single platform.** Every consultation highlighted the same structural fragmentation: vessel registries in one database, landing records in another, export certificates in a third, with no automated linkage between them. The lesson from successful models Indonesia's Stelina, India's UPI payment infrastructure is that transformative change comes not from building a new centralised system but from establishing open, shared protocols that allow all existing systems to connect and exchange data. Any AI-based solution must therefore be designed as a connecting layer, not a standalone portal.

3. Complementary Global Experience

Regional organizations such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA) serve as critical bridges between global mandates and local realities. APEC identified the lack of interoperability as the single greatest technical barrier to effective traceability. Interoperability, that is the ability of different IT systems to communicate and exchange data seamlessly is essential for full-chain traceability.

The Global Dialogue on Seafood Traceability (GDST) has emerged as the industry leader in defining these interoperability standards. The GDST 1.0 and 2.0 standards provide a "common language" for the seafood world, identifying the minimum Key Data Elements (KDEs) and technical formats for data sharing. In Southeast Asia, Indonesia has set a global benchmark by enhancing its national "Stelina" system to meet GDST standards. Stelina is the first government-operated system recognized globally for its ability to verify the origin, catch method, and processing details of seafood in a way that is compatible with international markets.

In the Pacific region, the FFA is managing some of the world's healthiest tuna stocks through its Regional Catch Documentation Scheme (CDS) Framework. The Pacific islands are "vitaly dependent" on tuna, which sustains livelihoods and national economies. However, the region faces the dual threat of IUU fishing and climate change, with tuna stocks predicted to migrate further east. The FFA's view is that digital traceability is not just an enforcement tool but a strategy for "resilient prosperity". By ensuring the legality and traceability of their catch, Pacific nations can add value to their resources and maintain access to premium foreign markets.

4. Proposal for a Regional Traceability and Value Chain Programme

Building on the experience described above, BOBP-IGO is in discussion with FAO, EDIF, and MPEDA, propose to establish a regional programme on traceability, catch documentation, and fisheries value-chain strengthening for the BOBP-IGO member countries starting with India.

The AI-based pilot in India would serve as the model system, with BOBP-IGO functioning as the regional knowledge and coordination hub, supporting national adaptation and scaling across Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.

(a) Proposed Institutional Mechanisms

- **Establishment of a national AI-based traceability pilot system in India** hosted at a major fishing harbour in partnership with an appropriate national institution, with BOBP-IGO providing technical coordination and the results informing national scaling under PM-MKSSY.
- **Designation of National Traceability and Value Chain Focal Points** within member country fisheries departments, aligned with the BOBLME-II National Project Coordinators, to facilitate country-specific implementation, stakeholder engagement, and data exchange with the regional coordination function.
- **Establishment of a Regional Traceability Coordination Function at BOBP-IGO** to manage knowledge exchange, provide technical support to national programmes, liaise with GDST and FAO on evolving international standards, and mobilise resources for sustained implementation beyond the BOBLME-II project period.
- **Integration of a marine ingredients workstream** as a parallel but linked component under the same regional coordination function, engaging with the Indian Marine Ingredients Association (IMIA) and equivalent bodies in member states, and aligned with the GDST marine ingredients module.

(b) Proposed Activities under the Regional Programme

The programme activities are structured across two complementary tracks. The first track builds practical field experience in India through a dedicated initiative developed jointly by BOBP-IGO and the Environmental Defense India Foundation (EDIF), generating validated evidence on AI-based traceability and value-chain strengthening under real operating conditions. The second track uses the BOBLME-II project's Component 1, Outcome 1.2 — which addresses IUU fishing governance in member countries — as the vehicle for understanding national traceability requirements in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, and for sharing the experience gained through the India pilot.

The two tracks are designed to converge: India's experience informs regional adaptation, and regional learning from all four member countries feeds back into the refinement of the programme's technical and institutional architecture.

Track 1: India — Building Field Experience through the EDF–BOBP Initiative

1. AI-Based Pilot for Traceability and Catch Documentation

- Design and implement an AI-based pilot traceability and catch documentation system at selected fishing harbours and landing centres in India, focusing on closing the first-mile data gap at the vessel and landing centre level. The pilot will be developed and implemented jointly by BOBP-IGO and EDIF, leveraging EDIF's established presence in coastal fishing communities and BOBP-IGO's regional technical mandate.
- The pilot will deploy AI-enabled catch recording combining GPS-based voyage tracking, voice-based species and quantity reporting in regional languages, and computer vision for catch identification and freshness assessment at landing across five to ten landing centres, targeting trawler and gillnet fleets supplying export-oriented value chains and engaging 50–150 vessel operators. Specific design provisions will be made for women post-harvest workers, who constitute more than 80 percent of the post-harvest workforce yet remain largely invisible to formal documentation systems. The pilot will generate field-validated evidence on technical feasibility, fisher adoption drivers, data quality, and the pathway to GDST-aligned compliance documentation.

2. Development of Bankable PM-MKSSY Project Proposals and Resource Mobilisation

- Working with MPEDA, the Seafood Exporters Association of India (SEAI), Indian Marine Ingredients Association (IMIA), and state fisheries departments, develop investment-ready project proposals under PM-MKSSY's Components 2 and 3 to finance AI-based traceability infrastructure for exporters, processors, and landing centres at national scale. The proposals will draw on the Pilot Design Lab outputs from the Kochi workshop and will be structured to support GDST alignment and EU and US compliance requirements within the available compliance window. In addition to PM-MKSSY, external funding will be explored from development agencies and financial institutions for value-chain infrastructure investments — cold chains, landing centre improvements, and ice plants — which are prerequisites for effective traceability. The programme will leverage BOBP-IGO's partnerships with EDIF, and FAO to mobilise technical and financial support.

3. Marine Ingredients Traceability Workstream

- Develop a dedicated workstream on marine ingredients traceability, aligned with the GDST marine ingredients module expected in July 2026, covering batch-level traceability mechanisms, electronic catch documentation at major landing centres for small pelagic species, and AI-based document processing to digitise existing paper-based purchase and weigh records. The workstream will engage MPEDA and IMIA to develop a national Fisheries Improvement Programme for key pelagic species and will support a circular economy approach that maximises the nutritional and commercial value of processing by-products. Marine ingredients traceability will be developed as a distinct but linked component of the overall regional programme, with direct connections to shrimp export compliance and aquafeed transparency.
- BOBP-IGO shall seek additional funding support from potential partners for this pilot,

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Track 2: Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka — National Requirement Assessments and Experience Sharing under BOBLME-II Component 1, Outcome 1.2

1. National Requirement Assessments

- Under BOBLME-II Component 1, Outcome 1.2 — which supports member countries in strengthening their capacity to address IUU fishing — organise country-specific consultations in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka to assess national traceability and catch documentation requirements in the context of IUU fishing control. These consultations will examine how traceability functions as an instrument of IUU fishing governance at the national level: what data currently exists on vessel identity, catch origin, and landing records; where the first-mile data gap manifests in each country's specific fleet structure and landing centre configuration; and what institutional and infrastructural conditions would need to be met for a catch documentation system to function as a reliable legal-origin verification mechanism.
- The consultations will be structured to generate outputs that serve both the BOBLME-II Outcome 1.2 results framework — contributing to documented national capacity-building under IUU fishing governance — and the broader regional traceability programme, by producing country-specific assessments that identify priority fisheries, institutional readiness, infrastructure gaps, and gender-specific constraints.

2. Sharing India's Experience with other Member Countries

- As the EDIF–BOBP India pilot generates results, BOBP-IGO will use the BOBLME-II regional coordination function under Outcome 1.2 to systematically share this experience with Bangladesh, Maldives, and Sri Lanka. This will take the form of structured knowledge exchange — including regional workshops, technical briefs, and peer learning visits — presenting the AI-based solutions, institutional arrangements, and adoption lessons from the India pilot as candidate approaches for national adaptation rather than as uniform systems for replication.
- Country-specific adaptation roadmaps will be developed collaboratively with national fisheries departments and BOBLME-II National Project Coordinators, ensuring that the programme addresses the full diversity of fleet structures, governance contexts, and value-chain configurations across the Bay of Bengal. Resource mobilisation support will be provided to help member countries identify financing pathways — including GEF-aligned instruments and bilateral development cooperation — to take forward country-adapted traceability programmes beyond the BOBLME-II project period.

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