



Delegates listen to DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu as he delivers his Opening Remarks.

2018 East Asian Seas Congress officially opens in Iloilo City

Some 1000 local and international delegates flocked to Iloilo City to attend the formal opening of the 2018 East Asian Seas (EAS) Congress, a triennial event widely recognized as a platform for dialogue, knowledge-exchange, strategic action, partnership building and cooperation in support of the region's common vision of sustainable development of the Seas of East Asia. The theme for this year's conference is "25 Years of Partnerships for Healthy Oceans, People and Economies: Moving as One with the Global Ocean Agenda."

This is the second time that the Philippines, through the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), is hosting the Congress in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Global Environment Facility (GEF), Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and the provincial and city governments of Iloilo.

DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu emphasized the importance of the event to the Philippines and the East Asian Seas region, and recognized PEMSEA's contributions to promoting integrated coastal management. Cimatu added that on the



Department of Environment and Natural Resources of the Philippines Secretary Hon. Roy Cimatu.

part of the Philippines, Executive Order No. 533 was signed in 2009 as the primary framework for all of its coastal and marine conservation initiatives.

"We need strong resolve and decisive action to move forward. Knowing environmental issues are multidisciplinary, cross-sectoral and transboundary in nature, acting separately will only lead to complex problems that are very difficult for individual countries to solve," said Cimatu.

Meanwhile, PEMSEA's Chair Emeritus, Dr. Chua Thia-Eng reflected on the achievements of PEMSEA, especially regarding its focus on cooperation with governments, noting "we have a very strong local government that has demonstrated it can achieve coastal management with its own capacity."

The 2018 EAS Congress hopes to strengthen regional commitments in the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources, seas and oceans in the East Asian Region under the Blue Economy—a sustainable ocean-based economic model that harnesses ocean resources for economic growth and improved jobs and livelihoods.



Dr. Chua Thia-Eng opened the International Conference.

Ocean Talk and SEA Exchange

Experts highlight economic role of oceans in the region

During the Ocean Talk and Sea Exchange segment, keynote speakers H.E. Aladdin D. Rillo, Deputy Secretary- General of ASEAN Economic Community and Dr. Laura David of UP Marine Science Institute, both stressed the importance of protecting bodies of water and the roles they play in the economies of countries in the region.

In his discussion, Dr. Rillo said keeping the oceans healthy is a key factor in ensuring the future generation and the planet as well. He, however, lamented that 90 percent of the world's oceans are polluted, thus, greatly decreasing their potential to help countries economically.

Rillo then called for every country in the region to embark on sustainable activities and partner with each other to address the problem. He also proposed that each country allocates funds that would be used for activities that are designed to protect and save the oceans.

Rillo stressed that healthy oceans can spur economic activities among countries through regional trade, generate employment, boost tourism, enhance food security and address climate change. "The growth of ocean economy can easily be achieved if we work together" he stressed.

David for her part stressed that healthy oceans when harnessed properly can be a great source of natural energy, such as those that are being done in other countries, particularly in Singapore.

She however noted that the persistent increase in temperature is one of the reasons why marine life has been decreasing and

why fish frequently migrate to look for new and better habitats.

David urged governments to develop decision support systems to plan and anticipate ways on how and when they can intervene to save marine species.

"The ability to transition to a sustainable ocean economy is the joint responsibility of everyone. It is to make sure that we are able to save this planet and ensure that we are able to save our oceans" David explained.

The Ocean Talk was followed by a SEA Exchange, which invited stakeholders to respond to the keynote speeches. For the day's SEA Exchange, Mrs. Noraini Binti Roslan, President of Kuala Selangor District Council in Malaysia, and Mr. Shingo Kochi, Director of the International EMECS Center of Japan, exchanged thoughts with David and Rillo, particularly on inclusive development and innovation in conservation tools.



EXHIBITION



(L-R): Mr. Ola Almgren, UNDP Resident Representative; Ms. Aimee Gonzales, PEMSEA Executive Director; Dr. Chua Thia-Cheng, PEMSEA Chair Emeritus; Mr. Rodolfo C. Garcia, DENR Undersecretary; Dr. Antonio La Vina, EAS PC Chair)

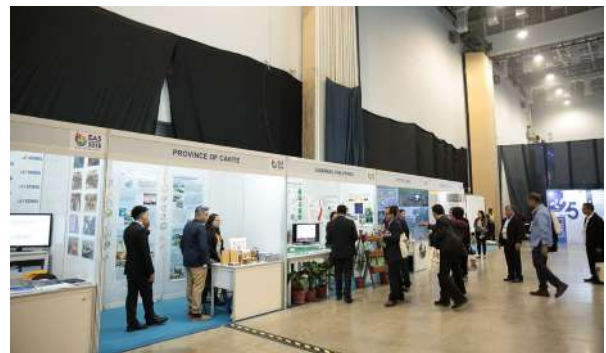
Immediately following the Ocean Talk & SEA Exchange and the Opening Ceremony, the ribbon cutting ceremony was held at the Plenary Hall A & B to formally open the EAS Congress 2018 Exhibit to the attendees.

The EAS Congress 2018 Exhibit is one of the key features of the event and will run in parallel with the international conference. Distinguished guests together with PEMSEA's Executive Director, Ms. Aimee Gonzales, graced the exhibit's opening. This was followed by a guided tour around the area.

Highlighting the Congress's theme of "25 Years of Partnerships for Healthy Oceans, People and Economies: Moving as One with the Global Ocean Agenda", there were three main Exhibit Centerpieces by the Philippines, PEMSEA and Iloilo as the venue host.

This year's exhibit is showcasing innovations and progress on various aspects of sustainable coastal and ocean management by PEMSEA's country partners, non-country partners and other related organizations.

Country panels also put a spotlight on PEMSEA's Country Partners' efforts in creating and implementing projects, programs, activities, innovations and progress related to integrated coastal management.





Satellite Observation Data-Based Systems for Improved Coastal and Marine Management: Moving From Research to Services

This partnership hub reviewed the status of satellite-based observation for coastal and marine domains, including latest techniques, example applications and downstream user requirements. Presenters represented China, Cambodia, the Philippines, and international experiences.

It was acknowledged that satellite observation data provides wide coverage and the potential to address marine management at regional and local levels. A common theme across the presentations and discussions was the need to identify user requirements and to appropriately engage stakeholders in the iterative development of Earth observation services as well as to communicate technical information to them at an appropriate level. Citizen science was discussed as a valuable way to get buy-in from stakeholders and to provide vital validation data.

There was recognition that the field of Earth observation has moved rapidly, with data more freely available than ever, presenting some challenges that could be addressed with training to increase capacity and access to online central processing.

A variety of sources of satellite data (both free and commercial) were used in a long and diverse list of applications presented. The topics covered coastline variability, coastal wetland changes, invasive species dynamics, vegetation health state, storm surge damage assessment, oil spill monitoring (mapping assets, protecting cleanup teams and determining the end point of operation). Also discussed were land administration and zoning, water pollution, harmful algal blooms and aquaculture site planning, illegal fishing, oil spill detection, and use of marine fronts for biodiversity and MPA siting.

A key recommendation that emerged from the session is that government agencies at all levels should consider Earth observation use in environmental management plans.

Capitalizing Upon Blue Economy Potentials for Achieving SDG 14

The session was organized by the Ocean Policy Research Institute of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation to examine case studies and analyze critical factors for promoting blue economy; safeguarding environmental sustainability and socio-economic equity; and empowering communities and stakeholders in the context of achieving SDG 14. Prof. Cielito F. Habito, Professor of Economics at the Ateneo de Manila University and Former Secretary of Socioeconomic Planning of the Philippines, chaired the session.

Ms. Caridad Canales gave a keynote presentation, which stressed the need to bridge global/regional-based platforms and on-the-ground activities. The session featured 12 presentations from Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Singapore.

The first set of presentations covered conceptual issues of Blue Economy, particularly its processes, structure and assessments. The presentations stressed the need to redefine Blue Economy and for information sharing and ecosystem-based management. Furthermore, a youth member highlighted the importance and role of marine education.

The second set touched on good practices and showcased several initiatives and lessons learned from around the East Asian Seas region. Again, cooperation among stakeholders, with emphasis on good communication and capacity development, were underscored.



Healthy Oceans, People and Economies: How Important is Biodiversity Financing?

Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) delegates from the global team, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand attended the 2018 East Asian Seas Congress to engage in dialogue, share diverse experiences on implementing finance solutions, and crowdsource ideas on scaling up.

Ms. Annabelle C. Trinidad, Senior Technical Advisor of BIOFIN Global, gave an overview of BIOFIN as both a method and a process done in 35 countries across the world. She also highlighted the finance solutions being piloted across BIOFIN member countries as well as opportunities for non-BIOFIN countries to implement the methodology through the regional node.

Ms. Anabelle E. Plantilla, Project Manager of BIOFIN Philippines, shared 21 finance solutions that the Philippines is currently implementing that involves national agencies, LGUs, citizens and the private sector such as policy initiatives, strengthening ties with partners, and establishing an M&E investment platform.

Ms. Niran Niranoort of BIOFIN Thailand shared their proposed finance solution on Payments for Ecosystem Services called environmental management charge for the conservation of Koh Tao Island. Mr. Bayuni Shantiko of BIOFIN Indonesia discussed Sukuk and Islamic Giving as a potential finance solution with next steps on market upscaling. Mr. Lorenzo Cordova of BIOFIN Philippines gave a case on localization of the Philippine Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and BIOFIN methodology in the provinces of Oriental Mindoro and Occidental Mindoro with current initiatives in the provinces of Cebu, Negros Oriental and Negros Occidental.

The open forum served as a venue for identifying potential opportunities for collaborations, particularly on impact investment, research and mainstreaming biodiversity financing in other sectors such as health.

Healthy Coasts and Healthy ASEAN: Saving the ASEAN Seas Through Effective Collaboration

The ASEAN region is blessed with vast marine resources. The establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) has been a proven strategy to conserve marine biodiversity as well as increase fish stocks. Despite this, the region is still 10% behind on its protected areas under the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. However, opportunities for creation and expansion of MPAs are available.

Expanding MPAs can lead to a healthy marine environment and numerous other benefits such as resilient ecosystems, sustainable fisheries, and food security. The generation of relevant, evidence-based data for modelling should be bases for such establishment of MPAs, as well as serve as inputs in decision-making processes. Partnerships among the national governments, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders are important in managing and monitoring MPAs.

While there is still a lot that needs to be done, appropriate actions were identified to attain healthy ecosystems. Regional cooperation, paired with robust data, creates opportunities to address cross-cutting issues in fisheries, MPA management, and marine debris. Apart from advanced technologies, sharing of local knowledge is key to determining connectivity of water bodies for proper decision-making. In developing and expanding MPAs, the functionality of marine ecosystems must be taken in consideration to ensure sustainability of fisheries resources. Finally, mainstreaming of environment and biodiversity in the education systems can generate behavioral changes geared towards the conservation of our natural heritage.



Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs): An Engine for Achieving SDG14

Of the 17 SDGs, one of the most ambitious is SDG 14, which addresses a breadth of issues confronting oceans worldwide. Successful implementation of SDG 14 requires replication and rapid scaling up of proven strategic approaches that can deliver one or more of its targets.

At the forefront of addressing these complex challenges are Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs). These regions harbour significant biodiversity and collectively provide important ecosystem services contributing approximately US\$ 12 trillion to the global economy.

The Yellow Sea, South China Sea, Bay of Bengal, East China Sea, Sulu-Celebes, Indonesian Seas and Gulf of Thailand are seven Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) of great ecological and economic importance to the region. The LME Approach has provided a rallying point for countries to cooperate in dealing with problems relating to the utilization of transboundary marine resources.

This Partnership Hub demonstrated how the GEF LME Approach currently contributes to achieving the SDG 14 targets, how country-endorsed Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis-Strategic Action Programmes under implementation by the LMEs can contribute to achieving the targets, and how GEF IW/LME:LEARN is supporting the LMEs in creating partnerships through its Regional Networks and other mechanisms.

The discussions that ensued focused on the need to strengthen engagement with the private sector and to capture the lessons learned in achieving the SDG 14 targets for scaling up efforts and replication. It was also suggested that the LMEs could enhance their efforts by working closely together, especially those that share a country within their boundaries.

Speed Dating with Technical Tools for Strengthening Coastal Management

Keynote speaker Damian Hine of The University of Queensland Business School introduced the models, tools and knowledge products developed by the Capturing Coral Reef & Related Ecosystem Services (CCRES) project.

Assoc. Prof. Hine said the innovative, new tools could be used to build system-wide solutions for strengthening the management of large, transboundary coastal, marine and freshwater ecosystems as part of the formulation and implementation of Strategic Action Programmes.

Delegates joined small, interactive groups, facilitated by experienced CCRES tools users, for a brief “date” with the tools. The tools can be used for marine spatial planning, mapping and modelling systems, developing enterprise-led solutions, and promoting sustainable behaviours.

Following the “speed-dating” session, Dr. Liz Izquierdo, Project Manager of CCRES, said the tools demonstrated the linkages between the ecological value of healthy coastal ecosystems and the economic value and market potential of the services that these ecosystems provided to coastal communities.

Under a partnership in knowledge management for strengthening coastal resources management between the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) and CCRES, the tools were unveiled in the e-library of PEMSEA’s Seas of East Asia (SEA) Knowledge Bank.

Mr. Makoto Harunari, Technical Session Chair of the EAS Partnership Council, welcomed the launch of CCRES tools on the SEA Knowledge Bank.



Marine Plastic Pollution: A Global Issue with National and Local Solutions

The session brought together a range of stakeholders representing national and local government, private, research and financing sectors to discuss the issue of marine plastic pollution. Setting the scene with cases from the local governments of Dili and Sihanoukville, the participants shared insights and ideas fundamental to addressing the issue of marine waste pollution including recognizing that there are three things that need to change in order to succeed: business practices, policies and human behavior. The group also heard about true issues related to microplastics impacts on human health and the need for further research on biotoxicity analysis.

The group identified that there is a growing demand for alternatives to traditional plastics, such as biodegradable materials, but agreed on the need for these to be genuinely sustainable and safe to environment and human health. It was also recognized that 'waste is politics' and, while investors are seeking long-term paybacks on investments, it is essential to work with the prevailing power dynamics to create investment opportunities and, at the same time, endeavor to improve equity in benefit sharing.

The most urgent challenges remain: the need for coordination, collaboration and public-private partnership development; reconciliation of conflicting objectives across economic sectors; the absence of a legally binding agreement for stopping the flow on plastics; an enabling environment to support circular economy, finance and investment; responsible production and consumption; data and research; and knowledge management, sharing, and education for improved stakeholder engagement.

First empowering women and balancing gender session held at EAS Congress

For the first time in the history of the EAS Congress, a partnership hub session focused on women and gender balance was conducted during the international conference.

The session, entitled Empowering Women, Balancing Gender: Fundamental Aspects of Adapting to Climate Change and Strengthening Marine Environmental Protection in the Port and Maritime Sector, was convened by the International Maritime Organization and PEMSEA. Its aim was to develop action plans to encourage and assist national agencies, maritime training institutes and the port sector to better enable women to acquire a high-level of competence and responsibility that the maritime and port industry demands, including coping with job demands and the effects of climate change.

Maritime academic institution the Maritime Academy of Asia and the Pacific, maritime organizations IMO and WIMA Asia, port sector representative Philippine Ports Authority, and emergency response organization ITOPF presented the different programs that they implement to enable women to train and work alongside men and environmental protection.

To move the women, gender and environmental protection agenda forward, the session delegates agreed to form a maritime and port sector network that will initially be composed of representatives from the academe, shipping industry, maritime organizations and international organizations spearheaded by IMO and PEMSEA. One key message emerging from the workshop was "the need for empowering women and gender balance has long been identified and that concrete actions should now be implemented."



Fifth Youth Forum welcomes EAS Young Leaders

"You can! There is no impossible. I'm possible," Mr. Kaisar Akhir encouraged the youth delegates during the opening program of the Fifth East Asian Seas Youth Forum. Seventy young leaders from 13 countries in the EAS region gathered to develop their skills and grow as ocean advocates, professionals and future integrated coastal management practitioners.

The day's program consisted of team-building activities, breakout discussions, and creative workshops that provided the delegates opportunities to get to know each other and meet advocates and leaders like Ms. Floradema Eleazar of UNDP and Dr. Antonio La Viña of PEMSEA.

Ms. Eleazar reminded the youth, "Millennial generations have a lot of hope despite what our earth is facing right now." She reassured the youth that their positive outlook and active engagement can do so much about pressing issues and contribute to the achievement of the UN SDGs.

A negotiation simulation exercise was led by Dr. La Viña, during which the delegates shared their opinions about climate change. He ended the workshop with a reminder, "What does climate change need? System change."

Capping the day was the launch of the PEMSEA Youth Programme and a breakout discussion where the delegates shared their suggestions towards the improvement of the programme. The first batch of country representatives for the PEMSEA Network of Young Leaders was also elected.



FUN FACT!

Micah Luis Feliciano, 11 months old, brings joy on the first day of the EAS Congress 2018 as its youngest participant. Find this baby at the Wetlands International exhibit booth!



WELCOME DINNER

DENR Usec. Cuna calls for unity to achieve 2018 EAS Congress goals

DENR Undersecretary Juan Miguel Cuna urged the delegates of the 2018 EAS Congress to work hard and ensure that the ideals and objectives that they all agreed upon during the Congress will be achieved.

Cuna issued the challenge during the Welcome Dinner at the Grand Xing Hotel in Iloilo City, in which he also called for the strengthening of cooperation agreements among Asian nations that would support the initiatives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs).

“There will be a multitude of tasks ahead of us. Our work will never be over as the protection and preservation of resources we have now should be able to tide over the needs of our children and their children’s children” said Cuna.

He also thanked the delegates for their support and commitment in saving and protecting the oceans especially in the East Asian region.

During the event, plaques of appreciation signed by DENR Secretary Roy Cimatu were handed to former PEMSEA executive directors Stephen Adrian Ross and Raphael P.M. Lotilla.



They were recognized for their unwavering dedication, relentless support and significant contribution in building strong relationships and networks with the organization’s partners and stakeholders.

The Welcome Dinner was capped by the colorful and impressive combined performance of three dance groups, representing the cultures of all the 11 member -countries of PEMSEA, while conveying the powerful message of the importance of protecting our oceans and nature as well.

#SeasAsOne

