



SYDNEY DECLARATION

Shaping a New Decade Together Towards a Sustainable
Blue Economy in the Arafura and Timor Seas

WE, THE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES OF AUSTRALIA, INDONESIA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND TIMOR-LESTE, CONVENED AT THE 2ND ARAFURA AND TIMOR SEAS MINISTERIAL FORUM HELD IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA ON 05 DECEMBER 2024,

- **RECOGNIZING** that the Arafura and Timor Seas (ATS) region significantly contributes to the global ocean biodiversity as the tropical corridor that traverses the North Australian Shelf and Indonesian Seas Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans with the Coral Triangle ecosystems;
- **FURTHER RECOGNIZING** that the ATS region, with its rich coastal and marine resources, both living and non-living, is crucial in providing people with essential resources and food security;
- **SUPPORTING** the development of a blue economy in the ATS region, where oceans, seas, coastal and marine resources are sustainably used and managed, protected and restored to health to ensure long-term provision of ecosystem benefits and services that will drive economic prosperity and growth of ocean industries;
- **MINDFUL** that without a holistic ecosystem-based approach to threats, and based on the results of the Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis 2023, biodiversity and human wellbeing of the ATS region will remain at risk and continue to face four strategic transboundary issues specifically marine plastic pollution and abandoned, lost and discarded fishing gear; oil spills; illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and the decline of endangered, threatened and protected species and critical habitats;
- **NOTING** the continuing relevance and need for dedicated regional governance arrangements to ensure sustainable management and development of the ATS region and address the region's transboundary issues by facilitating cooperation and collaboration among the littoral countries to implement the ATS Strategic Action Programme (SAP) 2024-2033, foster a Blue Economy, and help achieve the ocean-related national and global goals and targets as well as meet the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) obligations;

- **RECOGNIZING** that dedicated regional governance arrangements would play a critical role and provide a coherent platform to advance and promote the regional agenda in key global discourse on transboundary issues and in collaborating with other regional mechanisms and international organizations;
- **NOTING** the synergies and complementarities between the ATS-SAP and our national and international priorities and commitments including the UNCLOS, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and our Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement;
- **ACKNOWLEDGING** the works of the governments of Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and Timor-Leste with support from partners, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA) in developing regional governance arrangements with functional structural components and supporting sustainable financing plan and mechanisms to commence ATSEA’s transition into a long-term arrangement;
- **RECOGNIZING** the critical role played by the GEF-UNDP ATSEA Projects since 2010 in helping scale up national actions at the regional level to address transboundary issues, risks and other challenges, catalyzing regional collaborative actions, and implementing the ATS SAP and relevant National Action Programmes (NAPs);
- **ACKNOWLEDGING** the unwavering support of all international, national and local partners/stakeholders in providing the needed leadership, guidance and direction critical for the effective implementation of the ATSEA projects;
- **EXPRESSING** our gratitude to the Government of Australia through the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water for hosting the Ministerial Forum 2024.

BY THIS DECLARATION COMMIT FORTHWITH TO:

A. FORMALLY INSTITUTIONALIZE THE ATSEA REGIONAL GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS AND DO HEREBY ENDORSE:

1. The Regional Governance Mechanism (RGM) to serve as the key coordinating mechanism for the implementation of the ATS SAP 2024-2033 through its Structural Components:

- 1.1 Regional Component consisting of:
 - a) Council of Ministers to serve as the highest decision-making body for regional collaboration, providing overall direction and setting priorities;
 - b) Regional Coordination Committee (RCC) to serve as the regional policy and decision-making body to coordinate the formulation of supporting programs and operational policies, and development of monitoring, evaluation and reporting mechanisms for the implementation of the SAP;
 - c) Regional Secretariat to handle the day-to-day coordination with the different components of the RGM, and provide technical, secretariat, monitoring and reporting services in support of SAP implementation; and
 - d) Regional Stakeholder Working Group (RSWG) to provide advice to the RCC on priority transboundary issues that need to be addressed at the regional level;
 - 1.2 National Component / National Committee to be organized by the four littoral countries in accordance with their national priorities, resources and capacities, with the following core functions:
 - a) Serve as the national policy and decision-making body to coordinate the formulation of supporting programs and operational policies across different ministries and stakeholder groups for the implementation of the SAP and NAPs;
 - b) Handle day-to-day coordination with the ATS Regional Secretariat, and key national stakeholders, and provide technical, secretarial, monitoring and reporting services in support of SAP and NAP implementation;
 - c) Serve as the national mechanism for inclusive engagement of stakeholders at the country level in support of the sustainable blue economy for the ATS region, and providing expert/technical and cross-issue advice or inputs to support the effective and efficient implementation of the SAP and the NAP;
 - 1.3 Strategic Development Partners to support and fund targeted projects, provide technical advice, and identify convergence with existing initiatives contributing to SAP and NAP implementation;
2. The ATS SAP 2024-2033, as the region's blueprint for action in support of a Sustainable Blue Economy, and a continuing and evolving framework for cooperation and collaborative action across shared goals and targets focused on the four strategic transboundary issues described above, and supports existing national-level sustainable blue economy initiatives;

3. The ATSEA financial strategies and plans, as guides to foster efficient management and use of funds, and identify and mobilize resources from government, International Organizations, donor partners, private sector and other sources in support of the RGM and ATS SAP implementation; and
4. The transition plan, as a guide to the key steps to move ATSEA from its current project-based arrangements to a sustainable basis for long-term operation and coordinated action.

B. ASSIGN AND TASK THE RCC, WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE REGIONAL SECRETARIAT, TO CARRY OUT THE FOLLOWING ACTIONS:

Initiate and oversee the operationalization of the RGM and implementation of the ATS SAP 2024-2033 including:

- a) Develop any legal, policy and structural adjustments as may be necessary [and agreed by consensus] to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the RGM and support its long-term sustainability.
- b) Develop and implement a system for monitoring, evaluation reporting and learning to assess and report on the progress in ATS SAP implementation, identify challenges and emerging issues, adaptively manage the implementation of the ATS SAP and related plans, and measure outcomes and development impact to ensure transparency and accountability.

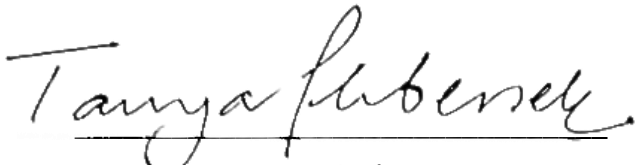
C. DO HEREBY UNDERTAKE TO:

1. Work on the mainstreaming of the ATS SAP and NAPs into the government plans, programs and budgets of our respective Ministries and government agencies;
2. Work towards an enabling mechanism for ATSEA's effective operations within our respective jurisdictions;
3. Contribute, within our national priorities and resource availabilities, financial and/or in-kind support targeted to the sustainability of the Regional Governance Mechanism; and
4. Contribute bridge financing for the operations of the Regional Secretariat for 2025-2026, within our national priorities and available resources. Additionally, assist the Regional Secretariat in mobilizing new resources and securing donor funds to meet its operational needs and develop mechanisms for a self-sustaining RGM.

This Declaration will become effective upon the signing of at least three of the countries of the ATS region.

Adopted in Sydney, Australia, on 05 December 2024 in the English language.

Australia



The Hon Tanya Plibersek, MP,
Minister for the Environment and Water

Indonesia



The Hon Sakti Wahyu Trenggono
Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries

Papua New Guinea



The Hon Jelta Wong, MP,
Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources

Timor-Leste

The Hon Marcos da Cruz
Minister of Agriculture, Livestock,
Fisheries and Forestry