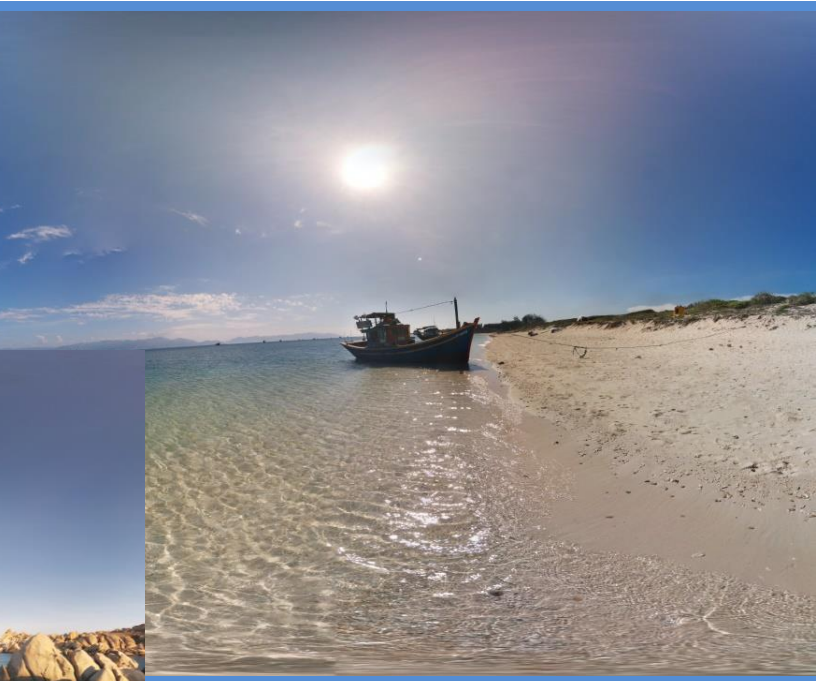




# Annual Review 2015

## Viet Nam Country Office



## IUCN in Vietnam:

International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) has a long history in Viet Nam since the middle of 1980s. In 1993, Vietnamese Government became an IUCN state member and IUCN Viet Nam Country Office also opened on the same year.

Since then, IUCN has made important contribution to biodiversity conservation and environmental protection, primarily through support to the development of laws and policies such as National Biodiversity Action Plan (1995), Law on Forest Protection (2004), Law on Environmental Protection (2005), the Biodiversity Law (2008).

In addition, IUCN works with partners to both support and bring pressure to increase transparency and accountability of government. IUCN Viet Nam's partners include the National Assembly, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics and Public Administration, ministries, and businesses, and local NGOs.

IUCN Viet Nam's programmes include the formation of multi-stakeholder groups to supervise project activities, support local NGOs through small grant financing, finance pilot projects to test improved practices, improve the quality of environmental news, engaging business to improve their environmental performance, and cooperate with provincial governments to demonstrate the benefits of nature-based solutions to environmental problems.

### Membership

IUCN Viet Nam has six local members: one state member (Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, MONRE) and four NGOs/research centers including the Centre for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES), the Institute of Ecological Economy (ECO-ECO), Action for the City (ACCD), the Centre for Marine Life Conservation and Community Development (MCD), and the Center for Environment and Community Research (CECR).

By joining IUCN, members can advance their own cause and add to its collective strength in overcoming environmental barriers for sustainable future.

In May 2015, IUCN headquarter granted formal recognition to the Viet Nam National Committee of IUCN Members. Viet Nam National Committee (VNNC) includes all six members in which Dr. Hoang Van Thang (CRES) and Dr. Pham Anh Cuong (Viet Nam Environmental Administration, MONRE) were appointed as Chair and Co-chair of VNNC respectively.



Members of Viet Nam National Committee © IUCN Viet Nam



## Marine and Coastal Conservation

IUCN continued with their ongoing commitment to the country's **Marine Protected Areas (MPA)** in 2015 by signing an MOU with the Directorate of Fisheries (D-FISH) of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) covering MPA management effectiveness (MEE) and financing, and species conservation.



MOU signing ceremony between IUCN and D-FISH in May 2015 © IUCN Viet Nam

A rapid MEE study of all 10 protected sites along and off Vietnam's coasts was carried out. The initial results were presented to MARD Vice Minister Vu Van Tam. **The study results including on-line MEE template for future application** were also presented at a workshop in Ninh Thuan Province. The presentations highlighted the very small proportion of MPAs that are off-limits to fishing, thereby limiting their value for fish recovery.

As part of the **Ha Long-Cat Ba Alliance (HLCBA)** initiative, IUCN has been working with partners and local authorities to design an updated environmental certification system for day and overnight cruise boats operating in the iconic World Heritage Site (WHS) and to propose the re-nomination of Ha Long Bay as Ha Long-Cat Ba Archipelago WHS.

HLCBA is a partnership between government, business, and community leaders that catalyzes action to preserve and protect Ha Long Bay and the Cat Ba Archipelago funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by IUCN.



In early 2015, a launch workshop was organised in Ha Long province in partnership with Ha Long Bay Management Board. Cat Ba was added to the title of the project as the fact that improved management of the bay requires cooperation between Quang Ninh Province and Hai Phong. IUCN also met with the Hai Phong People's Committee to discuss **cooperation on a possible re-nomination of the Ha Long Bay WHS (nominated under criteria vii and viii) as the Ha Long Bay-Cat Ba Archipelago WHS (under criteria x on species).**

IUCN and partners have **recommended some approaches to designing a certification system for day and overnight cruise boats in Ha Long Bay WHS.** Three – part approach is recommended including (1) the putting in a place of a decentralised and possibly mobile waste water treatment system for cruise boats that would be cost-effective and allow the government to implement its environmental regulations; (2) the establishing of a certification system for both day and overnight cruise boats that build on the existing Green Lotus standard; and (3) the establishing of a Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) accredited destination certification for the entire Ha Long Bay-Cat Ba Archipelago.

Two important milestones of the HLCBA in 2015 were organising two leadership committee meetings in May and December 2015. The meetings highlighted important outputs of the project and proposed a certification system to set out environmental standards for boat cruises to address environmental problems in Ha Long Bay. The first meeting was chaired by US Ambassador Ted Osius and the Vice Chairman of Quang Ninh Province. Participants witnessed the **signing ceremony of MOU between Quang Ninh, Hai Phong and IUCN on mutual collaboration.** The second meeting was co-chaired by Deputy Head of Mission of the US Embassy and the Hai Phong Vice Chairman. At the meeting, Hai Phong agreed to cooperate with Quang Ninh Province on the re-nomination of Ha Long Bay WHS to include the Cat Ba Archipelago.

Since 2014, IUCN has been running a **Marine turtle Conservation Volunteer Programme.** In 2015, the programme was conducted in Con Dao and Hon Cau National Park with the aim of raising awareness among local people around issues related to marine turtle conservation. As part of the



Marine turtle conservation volunteers bring eggs to the safe hatching areas in Con Dao National Park © IUCN Viet Nam

project, IUCN and National Parks also provided technical support to volunteers to aid them in supporting the park rangers' activities. IUCN called for applications from volunteers around Viet Nam and received 571 applicants. Through a thorough selection process, 63 volunteers were selected to participate in IUCN's volunteer activities. The programme received lots of positive feedback from the voluntary participants and National Parks highly appreciated the volunteer programme that IUCN had initiated. In the near future, IUCN will continue to run volunteer programmes in Hon Cau and Con Dao National Park and will also expand the initiative to other areas such as Nui Chua and Bai Tu Long National Park.

**Mangroves for the Future (MFF)** is one of IUCN's most important regional initiatives, starting from 8 member countries, MFF has now extended to 11 member countries including Viet Nam. For the past six years, IUCN has been actively involved in the implementation of MFF and Viet Nam become one of two countries with highest number of Small Grant Facilities (SGFs) among country members. ***In 2015, MFF Viet Nam selected six out of eight short list grants focusing on Hoi An, Quang Nam Province.*** The MFF SGFs are an important way to support local action in the form of community-based project activities.

In June, MFF Viet Nam hold a review workshop of Mangroves and Climate Change (MCC) – a component of MFF in Ben Tre and Tra Vinh - to share experience and lessons learnt with local authorities, and other country members: Bangladesh and Indonesia.

Although MFF has adopted mangroves as its flagship ecosystem, it embraces all coastal ecosystems, including coral reefs, estuaries, lagoons, wetlands, beaches and seagrass beds. The inclusive approach of MFF reflects the ecosystem-based, or “Ridge to Reef” (R2R) management approach that MFF brings to the rehabilitation of coastal resources.



MONRE Vice Minister Chu Pham Ngoc Hien delivered speech at R2R high-level roundtable meeting organised by IUCN in November 2015 © IUCN Viet Nam

In November, MFF Viet Nam successfully organised a high-level workshop on R2R approach in the Vu Gia-Thu Bon River Basin in Quang Nam Province and Da Nang city. Based on the discussion, ***Quang Nam and Da Nang agreed to set up a joint workshop group to discuss upstream - downstream development coordination.***

This is the follow-up to the launching workshop on “Ridge to Reef” approach held in October 2013, whereby the Vu Gia – Thu Bon River Basin and Quang Nam – Da Nang coastal areas have been selected as a pilot site for applying R2R approach.



A policy brief on R2R approach on Integrated River Basin Management of Vu Gia-Thu Bon and coastal Quang Nam and Da Nang has been published in English and Vietnamese.

Under MFF's Sino-Viet Nam Initiative (SVI), IUCN organised a workshop in Ha Noi and field trip in Quang Ninh for Vietnamese and Chinese mangrove specialists. The purpose was to **compare the state of mangrove based shrimp farming in the adjacent provinces of Quang Ninh and Guangxi and share technical expertise and lessons learnt between two countries.**

## Water and Wetlands Management

In February, IUCN participated in the **Mekong Delta Forum** in HCMC, which was organised by the World Bank and the Dutch Embassy. An important result that stemmed from the event was a broad agreement amongst officials and experts that rice production should be de-intensified in the Mekong Delta.

Falling prices and increased competition in terms of production (especially from Myanmar, which has 8 million hectares of mostly unirrigated paddy), have resulted in Vietnam's intense focus on rice production seeming less and less economically viable. Increased risks of flooding and biodiversity loss in the delta pose a serious environmental challenge too.

IRRI (International Rice Research Institute) participants at the Forum recommended that farmers move from three to two rice crops a year. This was a breakthrough because until recently government officials couldn't argue publicly against Vietnam's national **"rice at all costs"** policy. Participants at the forum also agreed that sea dikes should not be built where healthy mangrove forests instead offer a stronger and more cost-effective coastal defence solution.

Engaged in dialogue with IUCN and other partners, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) has also welcomed new ideas on flood retention and construction of new dykes. DARD also agreed to collaborate with IUCN on **a situation analysis of rice cropping in some coastal areas of Vietnam and to identify sites where a flood retention pilot can be implemented with the support of farmers.** DARD expressed concern about the high costs of maintaining dykes and they're keen to find solutions that can maintain or increase farmer's incomes without the need for such expensive infrastructure projects.

The high dikes also prevent the annual replenishment of soil and nutrients, increasing dependence on expensive agro-chemicals. Reduced sediment delivery is also contributing to the sinking of the delta. Meanwhile, Vietnam is stuck trying to sell large volumes of low quality rice into a falling market, which helps explain why the delta is home to the largest number of poor people in Vietnam.

In August, IUCN organised a validation workshop under the **Integrated Planning**<sup>1</sup> (IP) project to support the situation analysis of the third crop in Dong Thap Province. While there have been short-term gains in the household level from the building of high dikes to grow three crops of rice a year, there is widespread awareness that the costs are high and growing. Farmers say they are locked into the system and it is difficult to exit. Several alternatives exist, such as flood reason aquaculture using giant freshwater prawns, fish and lotus. But how these can be farmed within the high dykes is unclear. **IP will try to provide some answers by conducting a feasibility study to upscale lotus growing.**

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1 Integrated Planning to Implement the CBD Strategic Plan and Increase Ecosystem Resilience to Climate Change (IP)

Also as a part of IP, IUCN joined a development partners retreat near Ha Noi to discuss a new approach to development and planning in the Mekong Delta. This is based on the principles of the Mekong Delta Plan, which **recommends a shift to a more natural hydrology including, critically, a move away from growing three crops of rice a year.**

Another significant step forward for Viet Nam in terms of water and wetlands last year came as part of the **Building River Dialogue and Governance (BRIDGE)** project. Twenty officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries attended an event organised by the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV), MOFA's in-house think tank. The key message taken away from the event was that hydro diplomacy can unlock cooperation in a range of fields, not just water. Importantly too, was that senior DAV officials stated that Vietnam wants to be **the ASEAN leader in promoting and improving regional cooperation on shared rivers.**

Also within BRIDGE, a training event between the project and Viet Nam National Mekong Committee was organised in Buon Ma Thuot. The training was delivered by Dr. Alejandro Iza, Director of IUCN's Environmental Law Center (ELC) in Bonn, Germany. Twenty trainees attended from provinces in the 3S River basin, hydropower companies, and local water activists. Participants learned how to apply key principles of international water law. **Although Viet Nam ratified the U.N Watercourses Convention in 2014, this was the first time most of them had heard about it.**

On behalf of Viet Nam Environment Administration, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), **IUCN has drafted the Ramsar Site Information Sheet (RIS) for Tram Chim and Lang Sen** to nominate these two sites become Ramsar sites in Viet Nam.

In November 2015, Ramsar certification ceremony for Lang Sen Wetland Reserve in Long An was organised. The certification was awarded to Tram Chim in 2014.

## Business and Biodiversity

Working closely with private sector partners to improve environmental standards and meet conservation goals remains a top priority for IUCN. In Vietnam, IUCN has found that collaborating with businesses to improve nature-friendly practices is significantly more productive than criticizing from the sidelines.

At the global level, IUCN has entered a partnership agreement with Larfage Holcim to address issues of nature conservation in the cement industry. **Under the global agreement, IUCN Viet Nam and Holcim**



Mr. Nguyen Duc Tu (R) - IUCN Water and Wetlands Coordinator presented 3S map to Mr. Luong Van Ngu (L) - Vice Director of Lam Dong DONRE ©IUCN Viet Nam



**Viet Nam Limited (HVL) have been working in partnership since 2007.** The major milestones of the relationship to date have been the development of a Biodiversity Management System (BMS) for Holcim's operation sites and the proposal for the establishment of Kien Luong Nature Reserve.

Among the outputs to date, ***Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in 2012 for HVL's Hon Chong cement plant and the baseline survey of the biodiversity in Hon Chong, Kien Luong in 2014 should be named.***

In January 2015, IUCN and Holcim Viet Nam Limited already met to discuss on the quarrying plans and the impacts of primates and invertebrates. The feedback is conclusive that translocation would be complex, expensive and probably fail to prevent species extinction because extreme dependence on micro-habitat and risk of predation or hybridization in the destination areas. ***Preservation (i.e. avoidance) is the only realistic options.*** It is proposed that the company avoid quarrying part of Bai Voi, the largest and biologically most important hill.

In November 2015, IUCN cooperated with Kien Giang Department of Science and Technology organised a consultation workshop in Rach Gia to share the results and recommendations of the 2014 survey on plants and invertebrates of the 25 or so remaining karsts kills in the Ha Tien – Hon Chong plain. These hills are characterized by very high levels of endemism with several species confined to just 1-2 hills. ***The province agreed to move ahead to establish a nature reserve to protect the remaining unlicensed hills.***

Another of IUCN's ongoing collaborations with private sector partners is the **Mangroves and Market (M&M)** project in Ca Mau Province. New approaches that are both nature-friendly and economically viable have benefited both farmers and exporters by selling organically certified shrimps.



Organic shrimps collected from a farm participating in MAM project in Nhung Mien, Ca Mau Province © IUCN Viet Nam



IUCN organized a mid-term review workshop for participants from Ca Mau and Ben Tre. The key issues that emerged were the ***potential productivity gains that could be achieved through better post larvae (PL) selection and nursing, where or not the 10% price premium that Minh Phu, the large shrimp exporter, is committed to paying farmers is financially viable.*** New EU rules that make certification using the Naturland organic standard even tougher, and the possibility of using Best Aquaculture Practices, the U.S. label, as an alternative.

In addition, ***Minh Phu has been making a significant ongoing commitment to supporting farmers in Ben Tre and Tra Vinh*** as they organically certify their shrimp, which is beneficial to the environment and allows them to sell at a premium price.

Minh Phu CEO Le Van Quang asked for advice from IUCN on the criteria for Minh Phu's Mangrove Shrimp brand. This is a private label that the company uses to promote organic shrimp exports without the need to get them certified using the expensive Naturland standard.

Also, as part of M&M, IUCN commissioned an analysis using high resolution SPOT images of mangrove cover change in Nhung Mien Forest Management Unit where the project has intervened since 2013. The results show that ***mangrove cover increase by 12% between 2013 and 2015, mostly due to the recovery of sparse mangroves into dense mangroves.***



Organic shrimp collected from a farm participating in MAM project in Nhung Mien, Ca Mau Province © IUCN Viet Nam

Local women are excited to receive free clean drinking water from EKOCENTER in Ha Phong Ward, Ha Long city © IUCN Viet Nam

In August, IUCN had initial discussions with Coca-Cola to establish a community center called EKOCENTER in Ha Phong, the new resettlement area of communities who previously inhabited the floating villages located in Ha Long Bay. The center will provide free clean water, free internet access, support female empowerment and employment, provide educational training and leisure facilities for the community. This is one of six EKOCENTERS that will be installed throughout in Viet Nam in 2016.

Through HLCBA, so far IUCN has called for the participation of five businesses to become members of the Alliance which are Bhaya Cruise, Coca-Cola, Grant Thornton, Trails of Indochina and Indochina Junk. These members will provide both in-kind and in-cash contributions to the implementation of the objectives of the Alliance. It is expected that the number of members will continue growing in the future.

## Forest Conservation

Recognizing that implementing sustainable agriculture and aquaculture practices are a vital way to protect ecosystems such as Vietnam's threatened mangroves, ***IUCN assisted Ca Mau in submitting a USD \$20 million proposal for inclusion in a World Bank loan intended to scale up organic shrimp production over 70,000 hectares in the southern region.***

This represents 50% of all of Vietnam's remaining mangrove forests and the initiative would make a major contribution towards their sustainable usage and future survival.

IUCN worked with partners and communities in 2015 with ***ongoing assessments of the feasibility of organic shrimp production*** in other areas of Vietnam too, building on our experience in Ca Mau under the Mangroves and Markets project.

As part of global project, Viet Nam is one of implementing countries of the **Forest & Farm Facility (FFF) initiative**. In March, FFF's baseline survey of forest and farm producer organizations was carried out by Viet Nam Farmers Union and IUCN in Yen Bai and Bac Kan Province. The most successful was a cinnamon cooperative. ***Despite the demand for legal timber, there was no producer of furniture grade timber due in part to the difficulties of getting a permit to log legally.***

In October, an exchange visit of 20 Myanmar participants with Viet Nam Farmer Union was organized in Bac Kan, Phu Tho, Hoa Binh and Nam Dinh Provinces. The group visited different agro-forestry models in these provinces. The visitors were particularly interested in forest certification, organic vegetables, the role of banks, and forest-based businesses. They observed that by ***collaborating with other producers, processing companies and stakeholders including protected areas, farmers can boost their income from forest products.***

## Biodiversity conservation

Viet Nam is one of the most biologically important countries in the Indo-Burma region. Like other countries Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand, Viet Nam is facing population pressure, rapid economic development resulting in over-exploitation of natural resources, habitat loss of important species.

Since 2008, the **Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF)** has been awarding grants to civil society groups in the Indo-Burma region including Viet Nam. CEPF is a global initiative that enables civil society to participate in and influence the conservation of some of the world's most critical ecosystems. Since 2013, IUCN has led the CEPF Regional Implementation Team for the Indo-Burma Hotspot. In 2015, IUCN and CEPF awarded 4 grants for work in Vietnam, with a total value of \$380,000. These comprised two large grants to the Center for Water Resources Conservation and Development (WARECOD) with \$100,000 and the Center for People and Nature Reconciliation (PanNature) with \$245,000, and two small grants (less than \$20,000) to the Centre for Sustainable Water Resources Development and Adaptation to Climate Change (CEWAREC) and Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC).



## **IUCN, International Union for Conservation of Nature**

IUCN is a membership Union uniquely composed of both government and civil society organisations. It provides public, private and non-governmental organisations with the knowledge and tools that enable human progress, economic development and nature conservation to take place together.

Created in 1948, IUCN has evolved into the world's largest and most diverse environmental network. It harnesses the experience, resources and reach of its 1,300 member organisations and the input of some 15,000 experts. IUCN is the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it. Our experts are organised into six commissions dedicated to species survival, environmental law, protected areas, social and economic policy, ecosystem management, and education and communication.

The ability to convene diverse stakeholders and provide the latest science, objective recommendations and on-the-ground expertise drives IUCN's mission of informing and empowering conservation efforts worldwide. We provide a neutral forum in which governments, NGOs, scientists, businesses, local communities, indigenous peoples groups, faith-based organisations and others can work together to forge and implement solutions to environmental challenges.

By facilitating these solutions, IUCN provides governments and institutions at all levels with the impetus to achieve universal goals, including on biodiversity, climate change and sustainable development, which IUCN was instrumental in defining.

Combined, our knowledge base and diverse membership make IUCN an incubator and trusted repository of best practices, conservation tools, and international guidelines and standards. As the only environmental organisation with official United Nations Observer Status, IUCN ensures that nature conservation has a voice at the highest level of international governance.

IUCN's expertise and extensive network provide a solid foundation for a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects around the world. Combining the latest science with the traditional knowledge of local communities, these projects work to reverse habitat loss, restore ecosystems and improve people's well-being. They also produce a wealth of data and information which feeds into IUCN's analytical capacity.

Through their affiliation with IUCN, member organisations are part of a democratic process, proposing and voting on resolutions which drive the global conservation agenda. They meet every four years at the IUCN World Conservation Congress to set priorities and agree on the Union's work programme. IUCN congresses have produced several key international environmental agreements including the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), the World Heritage Convention, and the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. We continue to help these conventions strengthen and evolve so that they can respond to emerging challenges.

Our member organisations are represented by the IUCN Council – the governing body. Headquartered in Switzerland, IUCN Secretariat comprises 1,000 staff in 45 countries.