Terms of Reference for IUCN Consultancy

Title: OECM Legal and Policy Framework Review across CTI countries

Objective of the Consultancy

This consultancy to conduct OECM desktop reviews in the Sulu-Sulawesi, Lesser Sunda, and Bismarck-Solomon Seascapes, including a review of legal and policy frameworks relevant to OECM identification and recognition across the six CTI countries has the following objective(s):

1. Develop a harmonized methodological framework and data architecture for identifying potential marine OECMs in the Coral Triangle.
2. Ensure alignment of all work with CBD Decision 14/8, IUCN-WCPA Guidance on OECMs, and SOMACORE requirements. The consultancy will also ensure alignment with lessons and case studies from other IUCN regions to support global OECM knowledge integration while delivering CT-focused outputs
3. Consolidate outputs from the three seascapes into a unified regional geodatabase and synthesis report.
4. Conduct a comprehensive review and comparative analysis of legal and policy frameworks relevant to OECM identification and recognition across the six CTI countries.
5. Provide a regional synthesis and actionable recommendations for CT6 countries, elaborated in Section 3.

Background

Project Reference: P03771

About IUCN

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 is now the world's largest and most diverse environmental network, harnessing the knowledge, resources and reach of more than 1,400 Member organisations and around 15,000 experts. It is a leading provider of conservation

data, assessments and analysis. Its broad membership enables IUCN to fill the role of incubator and trusted repository of best practices, tools and international standards.

IUCN provides a neutral space in which diverse stakeholders including governments, NGOs, scientists, businesses, local communities, indigenous peoples organisations and others can work together to forge and implement solutions to environmental challenges and achieve sustainable development.

Working with many partners and supporters, IUCN implements a large and diverse portfolio of conservation projects worldwide. 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.

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About the Project

The SOMACORE (Solutions for Marine and Coastal Resilience in the Coral Triangle) project is a multi-country initiative designed to strengthen the resilience of coastal and marine ecosystems and the communities that depend on them across the six Coral Triangle countries, funded by Germany's International Climate Initiative (IKI) and led by GIZ and its Implementing Partners. The project enhances the governance, effectiveness, and sustainability of marine and coastal protected and conserved areas, including MPAs, LMMAs, MMAs, and OECMs, while scaling proven local solutions to the seascape, national, and regional levels. Within this framework, IUCN plays a central role by applying its global standards, knowledge products, and extensive networks to elevate conservation practice and policy in the region. IUCN leads the establishment of a regional programme to adopt and institutionalize the IUCN Green List Standard, training national experts, forming Expert Assessment Groups for the Green List, and guiding at least 12 MPAs through diagnostic assessments and evaluation toward improved equity, governance, and effectiveness. IUCN also strengthens marine OECM understanding and implementation, supports CT6 data management through the CT Atlas, and identifies sustainable financing options including outcomes-based mechanisms linked to the Green List. In parallel, IUCN drives knowledge exchange and visibility through PANORAMA Solutions, documenting and disseminating case studies across multiple languages, showcasing CT6 leadership at regional and global events, and generating policy recommendations that connect seascape-level practices to international biodiversity, climate, and sustainable development agendas. Through its combined technical leadership, regional coordination, and global outreach, IUCN ensures that successful models from the Coral Triangle are scaled, recognized, and embedded in long-term conservation frameworks, thereby supporting CTI-CFF's RPOA 2.0 and strengthening ecosystem and community resilience across the region.

The present consultancy is implemented by IUCN Global Protected and Conserved Areas, IUCN Asia Regional Office (ARO) and IUCN Oceania Regional Office.

About This Assignment

Marine OECMs have emerged as an important complement to formal marine protected areas in the Coral Triangle, where diverse customary, community-led, and co-managed marine governance systems have long contributed to biodiversity conservation, often without formal designation. Across the CT6 countries, Indigenous and local communities manage coastal zones, regulate fishing grounds, enforce

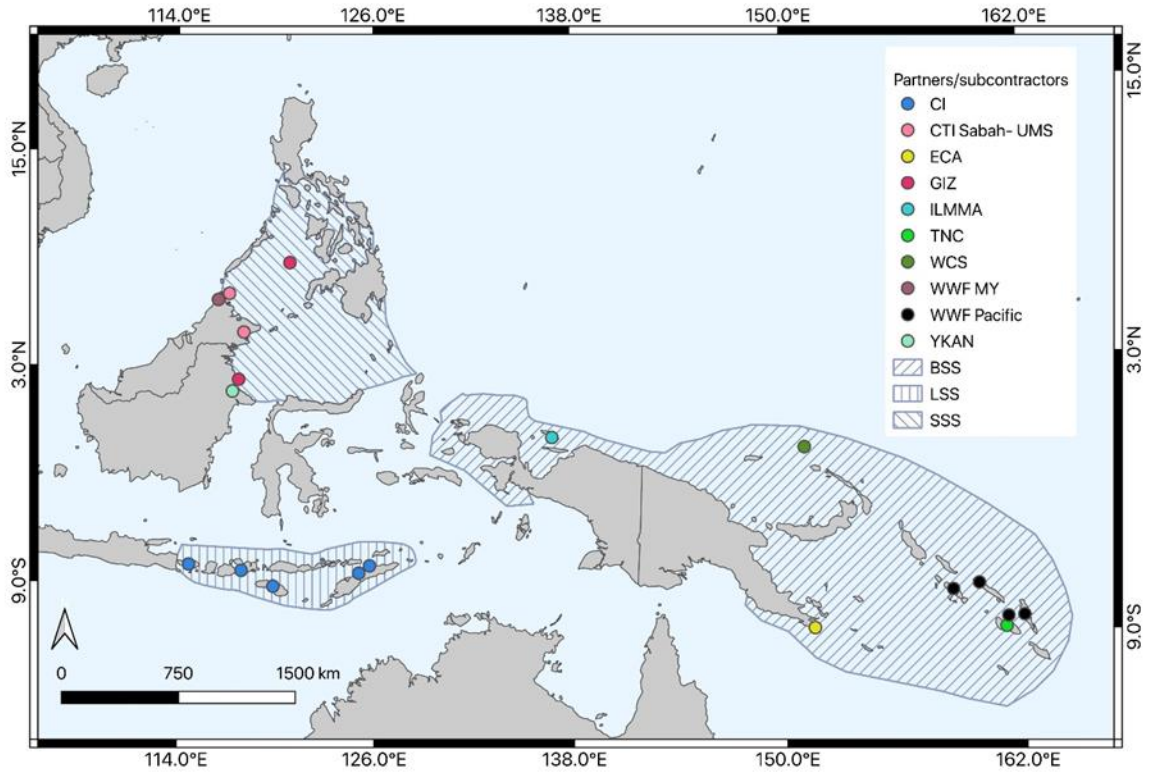
traditional closures, and maintain sacred or customary marine areas that deliver effective in-situ conservation outcomes aligned with global OECM criteria. As the Coral Triangle countries work toward GBF Target 3 and the ambitions of the CTI-CFF Regional Plan of Action 2.0, interest in recognizing and strengthening these area-based contributions has increased, particularly where formal MPA networks are incomplete, or management capacity is uneven. SOMACORE positions OECMs as a key mechanism to enhance ecological representativeness, social equity, and governance effectiveness in the region. Through awareness building, spatial planning support, governance guidance, and integration with global standards such as the IUCN Green List, the project provides the technical foundation needed for countries to identify, recognize, and monitor marine OECMs within their existing management systems.

Within the three SOMACORE priority seascapes, OECMs build upon strong local traditions of stewardship and varied governance systems, and complement existing and planned MPA systems.

In the Sulu–Sulawesi Seascape (SSS), spanning Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, a long history of community-managed fishing grounds, Indigenous tenure systems, and co-management arrangements provides a rich basis for identifying potential OECMs that deliver conservation outcomes outside formal MPAs. These include local no-take zones, customary fishing restrictions, and multi-stakeholder management models. Here, OECMs offer a pathway to recognize conservation outcomes in areas governed primarily for sustainable use, while integrating community leadership into national reporting systems and CTMPAS alignment.

In the Lesser Sunda Seascape (LSS), covering Bali, Nusa Tenggara, and Timor-Leste, biocultural governance systems such as awig-awig and tara bandu shape marine resource use and protection. These customary systems often stronger and more enduring than formal regulatory frameworks include periodic closures, species-specific protections, and spatial rules that safeguard coral reefs, spawning grounds, and coastal habitats. Recognizing such areas as OECMs strengthens their legitimacy, supports their integration into national planning processes, and helps link culturally grounded governance with science-based conservation and MPA network design. In this seascape, OECMs help articulate the conservation value of customary marine tenure and support national capacity building in both Indonesia and Timor-Leste.

In the Bismarck–Solomon Seascape (BSS), where customary marine tenure remains the dominant governance system across Papua, Papua New Guinea, and Solomon Islands, communities maintain some of the region’s most intact and traditionally governed marine areas. Clan-based ownership, taboo systems, seasonal bans, and community-regulated reefs provide strong candidates for OECM recognition. Many of these areas effectively conserve biodiversity through deeply embedded cultural practices yet remain largely invisible in national reporting and global conservation metrics. OECM recognition in this seascape can help elevate Indigenous-led governance, support sustainable livelihoods, and enhance provincial and national efforts to meet CBD and SDG commitments.



© SOMACORE, Coral Triangle Seascapes

Across all three seascapes, SOMACORE strengthens the understanding, identification, and monitoring of marine OECMs by aligning global guidance with local realities, supporting national and regional capacity, and ensuring that effective community-led conservation receives recognition alongside formal MPAs. This approach not only enhances ecological connectivity and management effectiveness but also anchors conservation outcomes in the cultural, social, and governance systems that have sustained marine biodiversity in the Coral Triangle for generations.

IUCN is commissioning a desktop review to identify potential marine OECMs within each of the project's priority seascapes: the Sulu-Sulawesi Seascape, the Lesser Sunda Seascape, and the Bismarck-Solomon Seascape. Each seascape exhibits distinct social-ecological characteristics, governance structures, and customary marine management systems that play a critical role in achieving biodiversity outcomes beyond formal MPAs. The review will draw on spatial data, literature, governance documents, and local knowledge to generate seascape-level baselines of areas that may qualify as OECMs under CBD Decision 14/8 and IUCN-WCPA guidance.

Description of the Assignment

The final objective is to generate a consolidated regional dataset and synthesis report that captures cross-seascape patterns, governance typologies, ecological contributions, risks, and opportunities for future field validation and potential OECM recognition.

The consultancy will conduct a comprehensive desktop review to identify, screen, and map potential Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) within the Sulu-Sulawesi, Lesser Sunda, and Bismarck-Solomon Seascapes. The consultancy will analyse existing spatial datasets, published and grey literature, customary governance records, marine spatial plans, and available geospatial information to generate an evidence-based inventory of areas that may qualify as marine OECMs under CBD Decision 14/8 and IUCN-WCPA guidance. For that matter, the consultancy mission will help recognise candidate OECM as the first step.

Using globally recognized OECM criteria and region-specific governance realities, the consultancy will identify candidate sites, develop preliminary boundary estimates, and produce indicative maps of potential marine OECMs. The ultimate objective is to provide IUCN and CT6 governments with a high-quality, scientifically robust seascape-level baseline of where OECMs are likely to exist and how they can contribute to GBF Target 3, ecological connectivity, customary tenure recognition, and seascape-level conservation planning across the Coral Triangle.

The consultancy will develop a harmonized methodological framework to guide the screening of potential marine OECMs in alignment with CBD Decision 14/8, IUCN-WCPA criteria, and SOMACORE requirements, ensuring consistency in governance assessments, spatial boundary approximations, ecological overlays, and risk analyses.

The consultancy will also consolidate all spatial and narrative outputs from the three seascapes, harmonizing metadata, attribute structures, and mapping conventions to ensure comparability. A regional analysis will be produced by the consultancy to synthesize governance arrangements, legal frameworks, ecological significance, distributional patterns, pressures, and gaps across the three seascapes. The consultancy will culminate in strategic recommendations for SOMACORE and CTI-CFF regarding future identification, recognition, reporting, integration into national and regional frameworks, and contributions to GBF Target 3. Throughout the assignment, the consultancy will maintain close communication with IUCN to ensure coordinated progress and timely delivery. The final draft will be consulted with the relevant local/regional partners, IUCN, and WCPA.

The consultancy will perform the following main specific tasks:

3.1 Coordination

- Develop a harmonized methodological framework, including criteria interpretation, data requirements, and governance assessment tools.
- Ensure comparability of outputs across seascapes, including metadata standards, spatial formats, and reporting structures.
- Prepare short communication package or stakeholder briefing summarizing findings for CT6 governments, NCCs, CTI-CFF bodies, and regional working groups.
- Sustain at least one inception and monthly coordination meetings with IUCN ARO, ORO, and HQ to confirm alignment of methodology and outputs, and monitor progress.

3.2 Seascape Analysis (3)

3.2.1. Data Compilation and Literature Review

- Collect relevant spatial and non-spatial data, including:

    - LMMA networks, customary marine tenure systems (clan tenure, taboo areas)
    - Fisheries-managed areas, sanctuaries, village-based closures
    - National and provincial MPAs
    - Coastal habitat layers: mangroves, seagrasses, coral reefs
    - Human pressure layers (population density, fishing effort, sedimentation, nitrogen input)
    - Ecosystem resilience and climate refugia datasets
    - Seascape conservation plans, academic literature, project reports
- Review governance frameworks, existing OECM initiatives, and relevant national policies across CT6.

3.2.2. Development of Seascape-Specific OECM Screening Framework

- Customize an OECM screening matrix using CBD Decision 14/8, IUCN-WCPA guidance, and SOMACORE context.
- Define criteria for governance, biodiversity outcomes, long-term persistence, and area-based management.

3.2.3. Spatial Identification of Potential OECMs

- Apply the Estradivari et al. (2024) spatial methodology to:
    - Identify non-MPA managed areas with conservation outcomes
    - Approximate boundaries using coastal village or sub-district polygons and 4–12 nm offshore rules
    - Overlay ecological and pressure layers to generate preliminary ecological contribution scores
    - Integrate management and governance data where available

3.2.4. Seascape-Level Mapping

- Produce maps showing:
    - MPAs and non-MPA managed areas
    - Candidate OECMs
    - Coastal habitats
    - Human pressures
    - Ecological connectivity and spacing

3.2.5. Prioritization and Recommendations

- Classify candidate sites into:
    - High-potential OECMs
    - Moderate-potential OECMs
    - Low-potential OECMs
- Provide recommendations for:
    - Sites requiring field verification
    - Governance strengthening needs
    - National reporting and CT Atlas integration
    - How the IUCN Green List Standard may strengthen OECM
    - Alignment with CTI-CFF RPOA 2.0 and GBF Target 3

3.3 Integration and Regional Analysis

- Merge all spatial outputs into a single regional geodatabase with harmonized metadata, attributes, and cartographic conventions.
- Develop a cross-seascape comparative analysis highlighting governance types, ecological contributions, geographical patterns, and priority areas for validation.
- Analyse spatial and governance overlaps between identified candidate OECMs and existing international designation areas (e.g., World Heritage, UNESCO Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar Sites)

3.4 Review of Legal and Policy Frameworks Across CTI Countries

Conduct a systematic review of national and subnational legal and policy frameworks relevant to the identification, recognition, reporting monitoring and sustainability of OECMs in each CT6 countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Timor-Leste, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands.

The review should:

- Identify enabling conditions, gaps, and constraints for OECM recognition.
- Review of national legal and policy documents relevant to the OECM implementation (particularly National Plan of Action/NPOA, NBSAP, etc.
- Analyse compatibility between customary tenure systems and formal conservation legislation.
- Map legal pathways for formal recognition of customary closures, LMMAs, taboo areas, and other governance forms.
- Provide a regional comparative matrix summarizing the readiness of each country for OECM adoption and reporting.
- Provide technical guidance for integration with CTI-CFF RPOA 2.0, CT Atlas, CTMPAS, NPOA and NBSAPs.

3.5 Synthesis and Recommendations

- Prepare a final regional synthesis report integrating findings from the three seascapes and the legal review.
- Provide strategic and technical guidance for CT6 countries with clear necessary steps for advancing OECMs.
- Provide inputs on how OECM results may influence National Plans of Action (NPOAs), given their central role in CT6 policy and implementation.
- Distil relevant global case studies from other regions (including legal, governance and implementation options), providing CT6 countries with practical examples of pathways to identify, recognise and report marine OECMs.
- Provide guidance on how elements of the IUCN Green List Standard may inform or strengthen the sustained effectiveness of potential marine OECMs, and identify opportunities where Green List could support OECM readiness and continuous improvement
- Provide recommendations on how CT OECMs could contribute to, complement, or strengthen international designations

3.6 Facilitation of exchanges

- Assist in socializing the results at national or seascape levels (NCCs, CTI-CFF working groups, SOMACORE working groups).
- When necessary, facilitate knowledge-sharing on marine OECMs across CT6 incl. contributions to MPA Working Group, Seascape Working Group, and SOMACORE/CTI-CFF meetings.
- Support preparation of learning materials, brief technical inputs, or case summaries for regional and national events.
- Participate - when appropriate - with IUCN cross-regional insights to strengthen alignment with IUCN's global OECM portfolio, while maintaining primary focus on the Coral Triangle.

Duration of the Assignment

Duration: 6 months (February - June 2026)

Estimated Budget Range: The estimated maximum budget is EUR 45,000, corresponding to approximately 60-90 working days for this consultancy.

Deliverables and Activities

The consultancy will produce an inception report outlining the coordination mechanism, harmonized methodological framework, and work plan for the assignment. It will later deliver a mid-term coordination report summarizing progress across the three seascapes, identifying gaps and issues, and outlining actions taken to maintain methodological alignment. A regional geospatial integration package will be prepared, including a consolidated geodatabase and harmonized maps covering the three seascapes. Finally, the consultancy will produce a comprehensive regional synthesis report integrating and analysing the outputs of the individual seascape level desktop reviews.

Deliverable	Description	Due Date
Inception Report	Methodology, work plan, data collection mechanism	February 2026
Legal and Policy Framework Review	Comparative analysis across 6 CTI countries, matrix and recommendations	March 2026
Geospatial Analysis Package	Maps and datasets identifying potential OECM areas	April 2026
Final Report	Three seascape individual report Synthesis regional report Recommendations Facilitation of webinar/presentations, when necessary	June 2026

Skills and Experience

The consultant must have the following skills, education and experience as a minimum:

- Proven track record in conservation planning, marine conservation, and OECM.
- Demonstrated experience in geospatial analysis for biodiversity conservation, including GIS modelling and connectivity assessments.
- Strong understanding of KM-GBF Target 3.
- Proven track record in scientific publishing in the Coral Triangle countries.
- Good skills in coordination, communication and public speaking.
- The consultancy team needs to have good knowledge and context of all Coral Triangle countries.

Supervision and coordination

The individual/firm/organization will report to the IUCN-SOMACORE team, e.g. IUCN Global Protected and Conserved Areas as the main report line, and the IUCN Protected, Conserved and Heritage Areas Teams (IUCN Asia Regional Office / IUCN Oceania Regional Office). The individual / firm / organization will also coordinate with CTI-CFF Regional Secretariat and the CT6 Countries Focal Points, under the guidance of the IUCN teams.

Intellectual Property and Confidentiality

All deliverables, datasets, and reports will remain the property of IUCN. Any external use requires prior written consent.

Additional Note

The SOMACORE Consortium Partners are not eligible to apply for this consultancy services.