



Subregional Office
EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA



Our Ocean Conference 2025

Collaborating for Conservation: Protecting the Yellow Sea's Biodiversity and Ecosystems

ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office, EAAFP, IUCN Asia, Ramsar Regional Center-East Asia, and Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea

14:30-16:00, 30 April 2025

Room no. 214, Exhibition Center 1, BEXCO

Busan, Republic of Korea

Overview

The Yellow Sea is one of the world's most ecologically significant marine areas and hosts some of the largest intertidal flats on the planet. Bordered by the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), it supports rich biodiversity, critical habitats, and essential ecosystem services that underpin socio-economic development in the region. These intertidal wetlands are among the world's ecological wonders, providing crucial ecosystem services such as coastal protection, carbon sequestration, and support for fisheries and livelihoods. The Yellow Sea serves as a vital staging area for millions of migratory waterbirds along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF) during their annual migrations. It is also home to important marine mammals such as the finless porpoise and spotted seals, highlighting its roles as a crucial habitat for marine biodiversity. However, the Yellow Sea faces growing pressures from climate change, habitat degradation, and unsustainable practices, threatening its ecological integrity and the livelihoods that depend on it.

To effectively address these challenges, a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach is essential, bringing together governments, scientific institutions, and conservation organizations to develop coordinated solutions. Effective conservation and restoration efforts require strong cooperation among national governments, intergovernmental organizations, conservation networks, scientific institutions, and civil society. Each partner contributes unique capacities, including scientific research, policy development, on-the-ground conservation, and funding mechanisms. The UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME) projects, implemented in two phases starting in 2004 and 2014 respectively, demonstrated how China and the ROK can jointly manage marine ecosystems through collaborative efforts. The projects aimed to reduce pollution, restore coastal habitats, and promote sustainable fisheries. However, gaps in continuity between project phases posed challenges in sustaining long-term momentum. Additionally, the Yellow Sea Working Group, established in 2016 under the joint facilitation of IUCN, EAAFP, and RRC-EA, has contributed to coordinating conservation strategies, strengthening policy frameworks, and engaging stakeholders in the region.

China and the ROK have made significant progress in designating marine protected areas (MPAs) and expanding UNESCO World Heritage Sites along the Yellow Sea. The DPRK has also shown increasing interest in the designation of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, with Mundok added to the tentative list.



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These efforts have been critical in conserving biodiversity hotspots, maintaining ecological integrity, and protecting migratory species. While DPRK's involvement is still emerging, it opens the door for broader transboundary collaboration, potentially linking with existing regional initiatives. Strengthening DPRK's role in regional conservation frameworks could reinforce collective efforts to safeguard the Yellow Sea's biodiversity and ecosystem health.

This side event seeks to foster collaboration, build synergies, and optimize each organization's strengths to achieve collective conservation goals. By assessing past accomplishments and evaluating ongoing initiatives —such as MPA designations, World Heritage Site and Flyway Network Sites expansions by China and the ROK, as well as DPRK's increasing role — the session will advance regional cooperation and knowledge exchange. The discussion outcomes will be used to develop practical, implementable projects to enhance the MPA network, strengthen EAAFP Flyway Network Sites and their sister site arrangements, reinforce flyway conservation efforts, and enhance wetland restoration. The event will also explore opportunities to design conservation projects that strengthen Yellow Sea protection among participating organizations, ensuring lasting and scalable impact through policy alignment and capacity-building efforts.

Objectives

- Highlight the ecological importance of the Yellow Sea and the growing need for enhanced collaborative conservation efforts
- Facilitate transboundary cooperation along the Yellow Sea by promoting joint conservation efforts and knowledge exchange among key entities such as national governments, international and regional organizations, research institutions, NGOs, and on-the-ground practitioners
- Explore practical approaches to improving MPA management, protecting migratory species and their habitats, and enhancing wetland conservation

Expected Outcomes

- Strengthened engagement of local, national, and regional stakeholders in the Yellow Sea region to sustain mid- to long-term conservation efforts, fostering continuous collaboration and policy coherence
- Identification of key actions to enhance the MPA network, Flyway Site Network, and wetland protection through joint efforts on migratory species conservation
- A draft proposal for a collaborative project on Yellow Sea conservation, aligned with existing initiatives and institutional capacities

Programme

Time	Agenda
14:30-14:40	<p>Opening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening remarks: Ms. Jennifer George, Chief Executive, East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat (EAAFP) Introduction of the session: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia <p>Group photo</p>
14:40-15:20	<p>Presentations</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ms. Xue Bing, Monitoring and evaluation officer, UNDP-GEF Wetland Office, China Mr. Seung Chang Bang, Team leader, World Heritage Promotion Team of Korean Tidal Flats Ms. Young Ran Lee, Founder and CEO, Plan Ocean Mr. Du Jianguo, Researcher, Third Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources
15:20-15:55	<p>Panel Discussions and Interactive Dialogue</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Olivier Chassot, Senior Programme Officer, Protected, Conserved and Heritage Areas, IUCN Asia Regional Office</p> <p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Young Nam Kim, Team head, Marine Protected Area Management Team, Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation Mr. Bernhard Seliger, Representative, Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea Ms. Yoon Kyung Lee, Deputy Chief Executive (Strategic Operations), EAAFP Ms. Seongbo Kim, Network Officer, Ramsar Regional Center East Asia Ms. Mi-Jin Lee, Research Associate, ESCAP East and North-East Asia
15:55-16:00	<p>Wrap-up / Closing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closing remarks: Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head, ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office