



## **Mid-term review of FAO-GEF Project**

**FAO Project ID: GCP/CPR/045/GFF**

**GEF Project ID: 4175**

### **Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China**

#### **Final Report**

**MTR conducted in November 2022**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**Beijing, People's Republic of China - December 2022**

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Note: All maps in this report are solely to show the geographical location of the project intervention area.

## Acknowledgements

The MTR team comprised of two independent consultants, one international consultant, Mr. Warren Olding, acting as lead consultant of the mid-term review (MTR) of project GCP/CPR/045/GFF (GEF ID: 4175): *Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China* (Project 045), and one national consultant, Mr. Fan Longqing. The MTR team conducted the MTR in accordance with GEF-FAO Guidelines for MTRs, which included the conducting of remote online interviews with key stakeholders in the project and interviews in the field with a sample of local stakeholders and beneficiaries living in and around marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Pearl River estuary (PRE) and the Yellow River estuary (YRE).

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### **MTR team**

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- *Fan Longqing (national consultant)*

### **FAO-GEF Coordination Unit, MTR support**

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- *Ms Genevieve Braun*

## Acronyms and abbreviations

AoA	Assessment of Assessments
AWP/B	Annual Work Plan & Budget
BD-SO	Biodiversity – Strategic Objective (GEF)
BD-SP	Biodiversity – Strategic Program (GEF)
BH	Budget holder
CBD	Convention for Biological Diversity
BH	Budget Holder
BOD	Biological Oxygen Demand
BOF	Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries
CBPF	China – GEF Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action
CEERL	Coastal Ecosystem and Environmental Research Laboratory (in SOA)
CEO	Chief Executing Officer (GEF)
CNY	Chinese Yuan
CPF	Country Programming Framework
EMC	Environmental Monitoring Centre
EOD	Entry on duty
EP	Executing Partner
EPVG	Ecological Protection Volunteer Group
EQ	Environmental Quality
ESG	Environmental, social and governance
FA	Focal Area
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FB	Fisheries Bureau (in MARA)
FIO	First Institute of Oceanography
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
GPBOF	Guangdong Provincial Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries
GP-NSMPA	Guangrao Polychaete National Special MPA (YRE)
GEBs	Global Environmental Benefits
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GIS	Geographic Information System
ICM	Integrated Coastal Management
JCWDPNR	Jiangmen Chinese White Dolphin Provincial National Nature Reserve
LBF-NSMPA	Lijin Benthic Fish National Special MPA (YRE)
LBSE-NSPM	Laizhou Bay Razor Clam National Special MPA (YRE)
LTO	Lead Technical Officer
MALG	Marine Affairs Leading Group (Guangdong Province)
MARA	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs
MEE	Ministry of Ecology and Environment
METT	Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool
MNR	Ministry of Natural Resources

MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPA	Marine Protected Area
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MIS	Management Information System
MOE	Ministry of Environment
MTR	Mid-term Review
NBSAP	National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NFNNR	Neilingding-Futian National Nature Reserve (in PRE)
NP	National Park
NR	Nature Reserve
OP	Operational Programme
OR	Organizational Results
PA	Protected Area
PEMSEA	Partnerships for Environmental Management of the Seas of East Asia
PES	Payment for ecosystem services
PEST	Political, Economic, Social and Technological analysis
PIF	Project Identification Form (GEF)
PIR	Project Implementation Review
PLWMCC	Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee
PLWEPA	Poyang Lake wetland ecosystem protected area
PPD	Policy and Planning Department (in SOA)
PPG	Project Preparation Grant (GEF)
PPR	Project Progress Report
PRC	People’s Republic of China
PRE	Pearl River Estuary
PRODOC	Project Document
PSC	Project Steering Committee
QDIPNR	Qi’ao-Dangan Islands Provincial Nature Reserve
QMNR	Qi’ao Mangrove Nature Reserve (PRE)
R-LHA	River-Lake Health Assessments
RM	Review Matrix (for the MTR)
SCCBD	South China Sea Biodiversity Project
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEIA	Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment
SMPA	Special Marine Protected Area
SOA	State Oceanic Administration
SP	Strategic Programme
SPBOF	Shandong Provincial Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries
STAP	Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel
SSS-NSMPA	Shallow Sea Shellfish National Special MPA (YRE)

tCO <sub>2</sub> eq	Tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent
TIO	Third Institute of Oceanography (in SOA)
TOR	Terms of Reference
TWG	Technical Working Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
YSLME	Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem
YRE	Yellow River Estuary
YRDNNR	Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve
ZCWDNNR	Zhujiangkou Chinese White Dolphin National Nature Reserve (in PRE)

## 0. Executive summary

### 0.1 Introduction

1. The mid-term review (MTR) of project GCP/CPR/045/GFF (GEF Identity number 4175), '*Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China*', hereafter referred to as "Project 045", was launched in September 2022 in line with the provisions in the project document (Prodoc). The terms of reference (ToR) of the MTR stipulate the main purposes of the MTR are to: (i) provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of the Ministry of Natural Resources Management and other government institutions with decision-making powers on estuarine biodiversity, such as the Bureau of Fisheries, which is responsible for the conservation of the Chinese White Dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*) and other marine mammals, as well as to FAO Management and FAO's GEF Coordination Unit (GCU); (ii) improve project management by providing valuable information (findings, conclusions and recommendations) to project managers (implementing partners), in particular in the Project Steering Committee (PSC), PMO and PEC as well as to FAO stakeholders such the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU); (iii) contribute to the development of the project's knowledge base to the benefit of all current and future stakeholders.
2. The TOR specify that the scope of the MTR covers all aspects of the project's implementation from the entry of duty (EOD), on 12 June 2017 to 30 September 2022. In geographical terms the scope of the MTR is to cover its interventions in the Pearl and Yellow River estuaries (PRE and YRE) located in Guangdong and Shandong Provinces. To this end the MTR team has placed heavy importance on selecting a wide sample of stakeholders and end beneficiaries (men and women) to help triangulate its main findings and substantiate its conclusions and recommendations. The list of stakeholders and end beneficiaries selected for remote and physical interviews and can be found in Appendix 3.
3. The objective of the MTR is to provide valuable recommendations on improving the project's implementation and achievements in relation to the following evaluation criteria applied by GEF/FAO: project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, factors affecting performance and level of application of cross-cutting priorities in accordance with GEF/FAO policies on gender equality, the rights of ethnic minorities and environmental and social standards.

### 0.2 Main findings

4. **Relevance** - *Question 1: Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework, the TRI global project objectives and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women and indigenous peoples if relevant?)*  
**Highly satisfactory:** The Project's strategic relevance has been enhanced by the government reshuffle in 2018, which has placed the management of all protected areas in China under the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (NFGA) in the newly

created Ministry for Natural Resources (MNR). In addition, it fully aligns with current national and sub-national policy, strategic and planning framework supporting the protection, restoration, conservation and sustainable use of wetlands and marine resources in the PRE and YRE. This has been aided further by President Xi's call to step up efforts to develop "ecological civilisation" in 2019, and support for the creation of a new National Park in the YRE in 2022. These developments have strengthened Project 045's alignment with GEF-4's priorities to increase representation of effectively managed marine protected areas (MPAs) in protected area systems (BD-SP-2) and to strengthen the policy and regulatory framework for mainstreaming biodiversity (BD-SP-4). In addition, Project 045 remains fully coherent with FAO's Strategic Objective No. 2 (SO-2) and Country Planning Framework (CPF) and contributes directly to the achievement of targets linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular under SDG 14 (Targets 14.2, 14.4, 14.5). Complementarity with the vast majority of projects proposed in the Prodoc is no longer relevant, due to the seven-year delay in starting the implementation of Project 045 in 2020. However, the MTR team identified a number of new GEF-funded projects and programmes, that offer significant scope for collaboration, in particular the GEF-6 project titled, '*Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity*'.

5. **Effectiveness** - *Question 2: To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives and what broader results (if any) has the project had at regional and global level to date?* **Highly satisfactory:** The project has made good progress on implementing its planned outputs under its four main components since the inception workshop in June 2020 and there is evidence that they are starting to deliver positive outcomes. However, the Project is will not achieve its objective unless it is extended beyond February 2023 and some important caveats identified by the MTR team are addressed, in particular the absence of long-term training of MPA management teams and cross-sector coordination to support more effective planning, monitoring and law enforcement. Positive outcomes that are emerging from the outputs delivered so far under each component are: (i) the establishment of a more integrated policy, planning and regulatory framework to support the creation of co-managed, ecological and social MPA networks in the PRE and YRE; (ii) the land area under improved management has increased in the PRE (3.7%) and in the YRE (1.0%) between 2017 and 2022. In the case of the latter this is expected to increase by a further 9.5% when the new wetland National Park is officially launched in the YRE; (iii) education and awareness among the general public and the Project's stakeholders on the threats and barriers to developing MPA networks has increased in the PRE and YRE and this has contributed to a major increase in public investment for eco-compensation agreements and restoration activities. In the PRE this has increased from USD 33.7 m. to USD 72.3 m. 2013-2017 and 2018-2022, while in the YRE it has increased from USD 20.4 m. to 190.5 m. over the same two periods and is largely explained by the decision to launch the abovementioned National Park in 2023; (iv) there is evidence that this growth in public awareness has contributed to a rise in the

number of people engaging in co-management activities, which is supportive of ecological protection and civilisation.

6. **Efficiency** - *Question 3: To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?* **Highly satisfactory:** The Project has suffered a very long delay of seven years between GEF's endorsement of Project 045 in 2013 and the start of operations at the inception workshop in June 2020. However, in the 27.5 months that have elapsed since the inception workshop the Project has demonstrated it can deliver its activities and outputs in a timely and cost-effective manner. Overall physical implementation was around 48% of planned activities to 30/09/2022, while total financial expenditure (including pending payments to 30/09/2022) amounts to around 30 percent of the GEF budget. The Project's cost-effectiveness has been enhanced by significant levels of in-kind co-finance, which amounted to USD 35.9 m. to the end of September 2022. This is 15 times more in-kind support than planned in the Prodoc and confirms that each US Dollar spent from the GEF budget has leveraged USD 45.40 in co-finance. The most significant contributor of co-funding has been the Shandong Provincial Government (USD 28.08 m.) and is attributed to national commitments to establish the new wetland National Park in the YRE, which will integrate five of the six MPAs in the YRE MPA network supported by Project 045.
7. **Sustainability** - *Question 4: What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?* **Likely:** Despite the Project's high level of strategic relevance, especially in the YRE where the creation of a new National Park management authority is already attracting significant levels of public investment, the Project's general lack of attention to managing risk is likely to have an important bearing on the sustainability of its main activities linked to restoration and conservation efforts of the ecological goods and services in the PRE and YRE. Indeed, the risk ratings and mitigation measures provided in the Project's Implementation Reviews (PIRs) were found to be outdated and in most cases have underestimated the risks associated with the going effects of climate variability and change, or the need for more cross-sector coordination and cooperation to address the risks and barriers identified in the threat and gap analyses conducted by Project 045. In addition, despite some progress in identifying success stories and producing knowledge products, there is a need for more support and training in areas such knowledge management and the development of synergies with other projects, before good practices can be replicated in an effective and systematic way in China.
8. **Factors affecting performance** - *Question 5: What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?* **Satisfactory:** Three main factors are preventing the Project from optimising its performance, or which are likely to affect performance in the event the Project is granted an extension. The first is the Project's outdated design, which dates back to 2009. As a result, there is consensus among all stakeholders that its outputs and outcomes would benefit from a review and updating, so that they are rearranged to improve the Project's vertical causal logic. In addition, the MTR team found the horizontal

causal logic is in need of review, to improve the monitoring of quantitative and qualitative targets and reassess risks. The second, is the lack of technical oversight by FAO-CN, which has increased dependence on the LTO, who has been limited to remote communications due to the zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19 in China. In addition, FAO-CN staff were found in need of more training and funding to apply the Executing Agreement in line with FAO's rules and procedures. The third, concerns the need for more training from FAO-RAP and the PEC on supporting the PMO and main stakeholders on developing more effective knowledge management and facilitating synergies with other GEF-funded projects in China through which information exchange on good practices and lessons learned can be upscaled and replicated, or used to lobby for change in a more coordinated manner.

9. **Cross-cutting priorities** *Question 6: To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?* **Moderately satisfactory:** There is no information provided in the Prodoc on the application of a gender strategy. Despite three amendments of the EA, gender has not been integrated into the Project's main activities to support the application of GEF/FAO gender policies and guidelines. However, the PMO does track women's participation rates, which average 27 per cent to date and is promoting activities directly targeting environmental education of school children to great effect.
10. **Gender** *Question 7: To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?* **Moderately satisfactory:** The ESS was launched after Project 045 was designed and endorsed by GEF. However, it has not been subject to review in the amendments to the EA. Analysis of the ESS criteria confirms two criteria are not being addressed by the Project: climate change and gender focus.
11. **Knowledge activities/products:** Overall, the MTR Team found the educational materials produced by the Project to be highly satisfactory, with attention given to producing these products in accordance with the needs of main stakeholders, including MPA management teams, teachers, school children and volunteer groups. This has been achieved with the support of quality assurance applied by the Project's Expert Committee and the Project Management Office (PMO). The PMO team leader has made considerable progress in developing a collaborative network of stakeholders through which knowledge products and communications are channelled effectively and efficiently. However, FAO-CN and the PMO would benefit from capacity building to establish more effective knowledge management to capture explicit and implicit forms of knowledge and skills that risk being lost when the project closes, thus reducing the opportunities for ongoing and new GEF-funded projects to gain access to important information needed to support ongoing efforts to establish a critical mass of stakeholders and end beneficiaries committed to halting the loss of habitats and biodiversity in estuarine ecosystems, or on coordinating key actions relating to law enforcement actions and combatting the effects of the climate emergency.

12. **Stakeholder participation:** Stakeholder participation was found to be highly satisfactory at the national, provincial and municipal levels of government, as well as within the MPA management teams who have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to share information and data within their MPA networks. Participation of local communities was also found to be satisfactory with evidence the Project has already achieved, or surpassed the participation rates in the Prodoc for the number of volunteer groups to be established and school children as direct recipients of education outreach activities. However, participation rates of women in the community-based activities were found to average only 27 per cent, while in decision-making activities in the Project – in the Project Steering Committee, Project’s Expert Committee and MPA management teams – it is unsatisfactory with just two women identified.
  
13. **Progress towards achieving the project’s development objective:** Overall progress towards achieving its objective is **satisfactory**. The Project has made highly satisfactory progress in delivering outputs under all its four of its main components to achieve a physical advance of 48 per cent in just 27.5 months of implementation. This has been achieved by spending 22.5 per cent of the GEF budget, or approximately 30 per cent when including pending payments. Moreover, the quality of the Project’s trainings and outputs delivered so far was generally found to be highly satisfactory, such as the wetland restoration activities conducted in both estuaries, the development of the GIS system and the production of environmental education text and reference books. However, the Project experienced a delay of seven years between GEF’s endorsement in February 2013 and the actual start of operations in June 2020, which confirms a time extension and updates to the Project’s design are needed to address some caveats identified by the MTR team. In particular, there is lack of emphasis on the development of multi-sector coordination mechanisms, the complete absence of gender objectives in the Prodoc and insufficient attention given to adaptive management to combat the effects of climate variability and change.
  
14. **Overall risk rating: “moderate”.** This rating is higher than the one in PIR-3 for several reasons. First, there is no proper assessment of risks. This demonstrated by the inclusion of the same mitigation measures provided in the Prodoc that date back to the design period of 2009-2010. Second, the production of GIS maps has so far not included the production of risk maps to highlight where biodiversity, habitats and human settlements are most vulnerable to threats identified by the Project in 2021. Third, important external factors persist that have to be managed, such as the implications of China’s zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19 outbreaks within the Project’s sites.

### 0.3 Conclusions

15. **Conclusion 1 (Relevance) on question 1: *Are the project outcomes and objective congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities***

***of targeted beneficiaries?*** In spite of the ten-year delay between the design phase in 2010 and the start of implementation in 2020, Project 045's objective, and most of its outcomes and outputs have stood the test of time as they appear to align even closer with current priorities and needs of main stakeholders at all levels than when it was endorsed in 2013. Indeed, the MTR team argues this delay has been, in effect, a blessing in disguise, because the political and institutional climate has improved since the government reshuffle in 2018. In particular, it removed the fragmented nature of PA management by a plethora of institutions by creating the MNR and entrusting all-natural PA management to the NFGA. At the same time MEE was entrusted with monitoring and supervising PA management performance. In the wake of the reshuffle, President Xi called for the stepping up of ecological civilisation in 2019. This has resulted in a number of new policy developments that support an increase in public investment in areas directly covered by Project 045, such as eco-compensation, restoration and conservation of MPAs and promoting education and research on biodiversity. This is especially the case in the YRE, where President Xi has supported the creation of a new National Park since 2020. In conclusion, these developments prepared the right conditions for Project 045 to set sail in calmer waters, as well as strengthened its alignment with GEF-4 Priorities BD-SP-2 (strengthening MPA management) and BD-SP-4 (developing the policy, planning and regulatory framework for MPAs), than would have been the case in 2013.

16. **Conclusion 2 (Effectiveness) on question 2: *To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?*** Project 045 has made very good progress in delivering a large number of outputs to 30/09/2022. This progress is already starting to deliver some positive outcomes in terms of establishing a more integrated and coherent policy, strategic and planning framework to guide the development, management and monitoring of the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE (Component 1); strengthening the capacity of MPA management teams in all 11 MPAs (confirmed in METT assessments) and which the MTR team confirms an increase in the total wetlands and seascapes area under improved management to 392,818 ha in 2022 against 387,320 ha in 2017 (Component 2); exceeding wetland and mangrove restoration targets by 5,791 ha and 10.01 ha respectively, with initial data suggesting some species are stabilising in numbers such as the Oriental white stork, the Chinese White Dolphin and native mangrove species in the PRE, (Component 2) and; meeting and exceeding targets in the Prodoc for number of volunteers and school children benefitting from educational outreach activities supporting marine biodiversity conservation. Notwithstanding these achievements, caveats are evident that need to be resolved if the Project is to fully meet its objective. The most important relate to an outdated design that has largely overlooked the importance of inter-institutional coordination and integration of important horizontal issues such as adaptive capacity, risk management and gender equality in all main activities, including the framework policies, strategies and plans

supporting the development of the MPA networks. In addition, the issue of how outputs will be mainstreamed into governmental regulations, technical guidelines and standards is unclear, especially because it will depend on inter-institutional coordination within the MPA network. Coherent articulation of these documents in the MPA's own management plans is also unclear.

17. **Conclusion 3 (Efficiency) on question 3: *To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?*** The Project's estimated overall physical advance of 48 per cent has been achieved in just 27.5 months and using only 22.5 per cent of GEF funds to 30/09/2022 (30% if including pending payments). Moreover, this has been achieved during the zero-tolerance policy of the government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The MTR team concludes the Project is demonstrating a highly satisfactory level of efficiency in converting its resources into results in a relatively short period of time. This has been aided by leveraging far more in-kind co-finance (USD 35.9 m.) than was originally planned (USD 2.28 m.), thus demonstrating GEF-funded projects can leverage significant co-finance when they align strongly with China's priorities; namely the creation of a new National Park in the YRE. However, due to the delayed start of the Project's implementation in 2020 and a very short extension of the Project to 03/02/2023, there is insufficient time left for the Project to complete planned outputs and achieve its objective.
  
18. **Conclusion 4 (Sustainability) on question 4: *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?*** There are positive signs that the Project's expected outcomes will be sustained in the YRE. Political and institutional support at all levels of government for the creation of a new National Park that will subsume five of the six MPAs supported by the Project. This means that it is highly likely that the management and network plans prepared for the MPA network will need to be adapted to support the management of the National Park covering a total land area of 351,799 ha, (34,025 ha. more than the current land area managed by the five MPAs), which will be managed by one authority. Moreover, the MTR team understands the budget for the National Park over five years will be in the order of CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion). However, the MTR team concludes the sustainability of the MPA network in the PRE remains challenging, because the coordination mechanisms in place do not have a multi-sector dimension to data monitoring and managing risks identified in the threat analysis and other studies conducted by Project 045, which is needed to develop informed and coordinated decision-making in areas such as law enforcement. In addition, insufficient attention has been given to developing adaptive management capacity to combat the climate emergency and on generating internal income streams to help boost the financial sustainability of the MPAs and their network.

19. **Conclusion 5 (factors affecting performance) on question 5: *What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?*** Three main factors are affecting the Project's performance. First, the project's logical framework (Results Matrix), has an outdated causal logic that is in urgent need of updating to improve the way it tracks outcomes (results), manages risk and supports learning. Second, FAO-CN is not providing any technical oversight to GEF-funded projects in China, which the MTR team concludes reduces its added value and visibility in China. In addition, there is no CTA, which places a high level of dependency on the LTO. Moreover, the LTO is unable to visit Project 045 due to the zero-tolerance policy COVID-19 that is still in place in China. Third, the PMO lacks human resources in key areas and would benefit from more support and training from the PEC and FAO-RAP in some key areas, such as developing synergies with other GEF-funded projects in China, or on knowledge management. Most important is the absence of a Chief Technical Adviser to act as the main linchpin between the PMO and its main partners, (the PEC, the MPA managers, provincial and municipal governments and FAO/other UN agencies engaged in protected area management). The PMO also does not have a M&E expert to support informed decision-making, knowledge management and communications.
20. **Conclusion 6 (Cross-cutting priorities) on question 6: *To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?*** The Prodoc and EA amendments provide no guidance on applying gender equality and the ESS checklist was not applied, because the Project was designed before it was launched. However, the PMO has taken its own steps to monitor participation of women and youths in its community-based activities and environmental education outreach exercises, which in the case of the latter confirm the Project has already exceed its target. In conclusion, the Project lacks a gender specialist dedicated to mainstreaming gender in all main activities to raise awareness on why women's equal access to, and control over, environmental resources and the goods and services that they provide in the MPAs networks is important to sustaining co-management, ecological and social networks and to up-scaling good practices.

## **0.4 Recommendations**

21. **Recommendation 1 (linked to Conclusions 2, 3 and 5) for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN, PSC and PMO:** the Project should be extended to 03 June 2025 in order to complete 60 months of effective implementation since the inception workshop held on 12 June 2020. This extension should be granted on the condition an interactive workshop is conducted to:
- 1) Prepare the ToC for Project 045, paying particular attention to establishing clearer and more coherent results (immediate and wider outcomes) that reflect the current political and institutional context, in particular the creation of the new YRE National Park that will absorb five of the six MPAs;
  - 2) Update and clarify the Project's RM, paying particular attention to:

- (i) improving the causal logic between the Project’s outcomes selected above and their corresponding outputs;**
  - (ii) ensuring all outputs are updated to reflect the current institutional context and needs of stakeholders and end beneficiaries;**
  - (iii) integrating gender equality and risk management as cross-cutting themes in all main outputs and outcomes to deliver greater inclusiveness and resilience.**
- 3) Revise the budget allocations to the Project’s main components following a review of the proposed reassignment of some of the outputs to a different component (see Appendix 6), or which are agreed should be added to respond to gaps in the Prodoc (see Recommendations 2 and 5) and which are considered important to support the Project achieve its objective and goal.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) Fine tune and adopt the ToC proposed in Appendix 9 with the aim of enabling all participants to agree on the Project’s vision and mission both inside the extension period and to Agenda 2030.**
- b) Formulate the RM using the ToC, the outcomes defined in Chapter 3 and the RM applied by the MTR team in Appendix 6 as guides. It is strongly recommended:**
  - one immediate outcome is identified for each component 1-4 by 2025, one wider outcome expected over time (between 2025 and 2030);**
  - outputs that are no longer relevant are removed and new outputs assigned where there are gaps/threats that may affect the achievement of outcomes and the Project’s objective;**
  - GEF and FAO Guidelines on gender and ask FAO-CN are consulted and FAO provides examples of good practice from other GEF-funded Projects on integrating risk management in their planning, implementation and monitoring. This should then be cross-checked with the assumptions and risks from the ToC and the threats analysis of Project 045;**
  - ensure the RM has separate columns for “indicators”, “baselines” and “targets”;**
  - revise the indicators into quantitative indicators that are Specific Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound (SMART) and, where relevant, qualitative indicators that can only be measured through surveys and which applies the Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked, Empowering, Disaggregated approach (SPICED). This is particularly important to measure transformational change through, for example, Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices surveys (KAP);**
  - Establish realistic targets that can be attained by 2025. Targets relating to SPICED indicators should be identified after consultation with stakeholders and beneficiaries.**

- c) **A review is conducted to determine how far existing funds could be relocated to priority actions. The MTR team suggests the following five priority areas should be considered:**
- **Supporting the development of a set of management plans (on infrastructure, ecological monitoring, education, etc.) development for the YRE National Park in which it can share the lessons learned and good practices identified from the last two years on developing the YRE MPA network;**
  - **Establishing a Task Force/Think Tank to determine how to develop cross-sector coordination and cooperation to support the development of effective co-management, ecological, social and law enforcement networks in the PRE;**
  - **Exploring formal synergies where information, collaboration and funding could be shared with GEF-funded project managed by FAO and UNDP via a memorandum of understanding (MoU) agreeing to, for example, collaboration in the form of in-kind co-funding arrangements, and/or *ad hoc* arrangements. For example, in the case of the MoU foreseen with the GEF6-funded project ‘Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity’, it should include provisions to share funding in areas of mutual interest and clarify Project 045’s communication channels with the wider umbrella programme on ‘Protected Area System Reform’;**
  - **Piloting multi-agency monitoring of ecological and socio-economic data to promote ecological civilisation (at all levels) on the causes and effects of human activity on estuarine ecosystems, develop informed decision-making and improve reporting on national and international targets and goals;**
  - **Conducting a biodiversity conservation gap analysis in the PRE concerning the conservation of the Chinese White Dolphin and recommendations provided on the co-management areas and approach to be adopted (such as other effective area-based conservation areas (OECMs)).**
22. **Recommendation 2 (linked to conclusions 2 and 4) for FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, the PMO and the PSC: The Project should train the MPA management teams to integrate the following framework plans, regulations and actions into their management plans (Output 2.2): the eco-compensation plan (Output 1.1); MPA network regulations (Output 1.3); integrated management and networking plans (Output 1.4); restoration strategies (Output 1.5); long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans (Output 1.6) investment strategies (Output 3.1). In addition, the Project should identify two framework plans that are currently missing on: capacity development (to develop and maintain co-management, ecological and social networks) and law enforcement (to develop a multi-sector mechanism to control illegal or bad practices with the support of local communities).**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) **Using the template in the 2002 Guidelines, "Outline of Management Plans for National Nature Reserves"<sup>1</sup> (includes Marine Nature Reserves), training should focus on preparing the management plans for each MPA in the PRE (and potentially in the YRE National Park) as follows:**
    - **Restoration planning (link to Outputs 1.1 and 1.5);**
    - **Research and monitoring planning (link to Output 1.6);**
    - **Rational development and use of resources plan (link to Output 3.1).**
    - **Community work mission planning (link to outputs 4.1 and 4.5);**
  - b) **Using the template in the 2008 "Technical Guidelines for functional zonation and management plan compilation" (includes Special Marine Protected Areas), training should focus on preparing the management plan for the GPNSMPA as follows:**
    - **Scientific research and monitoring planning (link to Output 1.6); e**
    - **Eco-restoration planning (Outputs 1.1 and 1.5);**
    - **Publicity and education planning (link to Outputs 4.5 and 4.6);**
    - **Community co-management (link to Outputs 1.4 and 4.2);**
    - **Eco-industry development planning (link to Output 3.1).**
  - c) **In line with Recommendation 1 (point b, sub-point (ii) on new outputs), it is suggested two further framework plans are prepared to support each MPA in the PRE and the YRE National Park and GPNSMPA complete their corresponding templates in the following two areas:**
    - **Training needs assessment and capacity development plan. This is justified on the grounds the MPA management teams still need more capacity building according to the latest METT assessments in 2021 to implement MPA plans that support the establishment of co-management, ecological and social networks;**
    - **Patrolling/law enforcement framework plan. This is justified, because there is a need for MPA management teams to work more closely with the municipal law enforcement teams and some key sectors on controlling pollution, illegal fishing and marine transport lanes, among others.**
23. **Recommendation 3 (linked to Conclusions 3 and 5) for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP, FAO-CN: FAO stakeholders should conduct an online workshop to identify consensus on three issues. First, identify and agree on the role FAO-CN should play in supporting technical oversight of the GEF project portfolio in China. Second, agree on a long-term training plan of FAO stakeholders to strengthen their administrative, technical and coordination/strategic decision-making roles and responsibilities. Third, review the current funding arrangements applied to manage**

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<sup>1</sup> The MTR team found this template in the report for the North-East Asia MPA Network (2021), p.16, provided by the PEC/PMO.

**the GEF project portfolio at the country office level. The main goal of this review should be to determine how FAO increase its added value in GEF-funded projects, as well as enhance its visibility both nationally and internationally.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on technical oversight:**

- a) **FAO-CN, FAO-RAP and FAO-R should conduct a preliminary meeting in December 2022 to agree on the date and agenda of the online workshop in early 2023.**
- b) **It is recommended that the agenda discusses the possible options for enhancing FAO-CN's technical oversight of the GEF project portfolio. For example, the MTR team recommends either a technical adviser is recruited full-time (preferred option), or one or more existing staff members in FAO-CN is/are trained, to act as the main filter between the PMOs of GEF-funded projects and the LTO.**
- c) **Key roles and responsibilities of the technical adviser(s) recruited/trained should be, on the one hand, to provide general technical oversight functions. On the other, to stimulate formal synergies and partnerships between GEF projects in areas of mutual interest. These include information and data exchange, joint training sessions, sharing of lessons learned and good practices, technical and administrative exchanges and coordination of international and national training events, publications and conferences.**
- d) **It is strongly recommended the technical adviser(s) recruited/trained is/are able to provide technical support in five key areas (in line with GEF/FAO Priorities):**
  - **On biodiversity/habitat restoration, conservation and sustainable use;**
  - **On adaptive management to ensure risk management is fully integrated into restoration, conservation and sustainable use methods and practices to build resilient ecosystems and communities;**
  - **On gender equality, (preferably through joint training with men) to enhance awareness and understanding on how the empowerment of women and youths is crucial to sustaining restoration, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in China;**
  - **On identifying with the PMOs areas where staff need support, guidance and training, especially in areas such as knowledge management, the development of joint training exercises and publications with other GEF-funded projects in areas of mutual interest, monitoring of key criteria in the ESS Checklist (to support reporting on the reduction of biodiversity loss, restoration of habitats, and contributions to the 2030 Agenda);**
  - **On latest thinking and initiatives of the UN system in general and FAO in particular after international events, such as COP24 (for climate change) recently completed in November 2022 and COP15 (for biodiversity), which is currently taking place in December 2022;**
  - **On applying GEF/FAO priorities and guidelines on gender.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on the staff training:**

- a) **It is recommended that the long-term training plan has as its main objective to seek maximum institutional complementarity between FAO stakeholders. A key element should, therefore, focus on strengthening the linkages between the administrative, technical and coordination/strategic decision-making roles and responsibilities of FAO-CN, FAO-RAP and FAO-R.**
- b) **To support the application of the long-term training plan, FAO stakeholders should develop a communications platform that supports two areas of staff development. First, the exchange of information and data to capture the strengths and weaknesses of project design, performance and impact. The MTR team considers this is crucial to stimulating informed dialogue and decision-making on optimising the transformative potential of GEF-funded projects. For example, the MTR team observed in Project 045 (and in other GEF-funded projects such as 052, 056 and 057) that mitigation is largely overlooked as a co-benefit of adaptation, especially where restoration of habitats and biodiversity are applying nature-based solutions. Second, monitoring of the training plan's effectiveness to support and guide the updating of the training plan on an annual or bi-annual basis. For example, the MTR team discovered Project 045 (and other GEF-funded projects in China) generate a lot of explicit and implicit knowledge through, for example, its restoration activities, or engagement of progressive entrepreneurs from the private sector. In both cases new skills appear to be developing that may explain why Project 045 has achieved high levels of productivity and cost-effectiveness, especially in some of the MPAs visited (for example, QDIPNR in PRE and YRDNNR in YRE). However, this is not being captured effectively through, for example KAP surveys, to support the development of knowledge management in FAO-CN.**
- c) **It is strongly recommended that the training plan covers the period 2023-2030 so that it can also be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. In this way FAO can also use the training plan and its communications platform to promote its work in China and enhance its visibility among key national stakeholders, including MNR, MEE and MARN.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on funding:**

- a) **In the light of the recently conducted GEF Fee review, it is recommended an independent review is conducted to identify how the allocated GEF administration fee should be optimised to enhance the added-value of FAO's support at the country office level. The main aim of the review should, therefore, focus on identifying a sustainable funding plan that supports the country office apply both administrative and technical oversight of the GEF portfolio, as well as the long-term training plan recommended above.**
- b) **It is recommended the study includes case studies of at least three country offices, one of which should be FAO-CN.**
- c) **The review should not only look at funding needs, but also where greater efficiency could be achieved at the country, regional and central levels of FAO.**

- d) **It is recommended the funding plan proposed covers the same period as the abovementioned training plan (2023-2030) to ensure there are no gaps in funding of the training programme.**
  - e) **It is recommended this independent review is conducted as soon as possible in 2023 after agreement has been reached on how to strengthening the technical oversight functions of country offices such as FAO-CN.**
24. **Recommendation 4 (linked to conclusions 5 and 6) for the FAO-R, FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, PSC and PMO: In the event Recommendation 1 is accepted and the Project is extended, the PSC should consider authorising the PMO to recruit a Chief Technical Adviser, a Monitoring and Evaluation specialist and a Gender specialist. It is recommended all three are recruited on a part-time basis and in accordance with the PSC's views on the Project's needs and resources available. The MTR team suggests the CTA is recruited on a flexible sub-contracting arrangement that covers at least 150 work/days per annum in order he/she has enough time to support some key areas that need strengthening such as stimulating cross-sector cooperation in the PRE MPA network, addressing the output gaps mentioned under Recommendation 2 (and Recommendation 5 below), improving communication channels and knowledge management with FAO-CN and FAO-RAP, as well as other UN agencies such as UNDP in China in line with Recommendation 4.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) **If possible, the recruitment of the CTA should be fast-tracked in order he/she participates in the workshop proposed in Recommendation 1. The MTR team suggests the CTA is an international expert who has in-depth work experience in the management of marine ecosystems (preferably including estuarine MPAs). However, in the event the zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19 persists into 2023, the recruitment of a Chinese expert for the CTA position with similar experience should be prioritised;**
- b) **The TOR of the CTA should focus on supporting the PMO and main stakeholder address the priority areas of support selected in the abovementioned workshop. This should, preferably, be on supporting the shift within Project 045 to supporting the development of co-management, ecological and social networks within the YRE National Park and the MPA network in the PRE. In addition, the CTA should have good communication skills to support and guide the setting up of the Task Force/Think Tank proposed in Recommendation 1 and implement its recommendations on the establishment of cross-sector coordination mechanisms in the PRE;**
- c) **The recruitment of the M&E specialist should have in-depth knowledge and experience on monitoring of ecological and socio-economic data and its evaluation, as well as the capture of explicit and implicit knowledge, to support decision-makers (from different sectors at the Provincial and municipal**

- government levels) take informed decisions on developing and improving co-management, ecological, social and law enforcement networks in the PRE and YRE National Park;**
- d) The M&E specialist should also be able to systematise his/her work to support the PMO promote its ecological civilisation activities, especially under components 2 and 4;**
  - e) The gender specialist should have in-depth knowledge on developing a gender strategy dedicated to integrating gender equality into policies, strategies and plans, in regulations and guidelines and in training and educational activities, among others. In all cases this should be performed in accordance with GEF and FAO priorities;**
  - f) The gender specialist should have systematisation skills to support the PMO produce, publish and increase the visibility of the Project's knowledge products, including success stories and good practices.**
- 25. Recommendation 5 (linked to conclusions 2 and 4) for FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, the PMO and the PSC: The GIS database should be expanded to develop risk maps that show marine habitats and biodiversity that are most vulnerable to climate variability and change, natural disasters and degradation due to socio-economic activity in the PRE MPA network and the YRE National Park.**

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) DeepNature should be requested to support the development of a pilot set of these risk maps using existing images and data as far as possible and supported by ground truthing where necessary with the participation of the local volunteer groups;**
- b) It is recommended risk maps pay particular attention to weather/climate-induced events, in particular: typhoons causing sea surges and floods, sea-level rise, and droughts;**
- c) DeepNature should develop a training course to demonstrate how these maps are produced and can be used to support informed decision-making on integrating risk management in the Project's main activities, in line with Recommendation 1 (point b) and Recommendation 4 (point c). For example, its application in restoration strategies should demonstrate how restoration activities help increase resilience.**
- d) The PMO staff should assess how the risk maps could be used in the education outreach activities to develop awareness and action on enhancing public safety and learning on how restoration of wetlands, mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs enhance resilience of the ecosystem and people;**
- e) The PMO should assess, whether the risk maps could also stimulate restoration actions that store carbon and offer opportunities for carbon offset trading, which has already been developed by Project 056 in Fujian Province.**

- f) **The PMO should determine whether there are funds to develop an early warning phone app that can also be used to, for example, support bird and dolphin monitoring.**

## 0.5 Table 1 - GEF rating table

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating <sup>2</sup>	Summary comments <sup>3</sup>
<b>A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE</b>		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Strategic relevance is high thanks to the Government reshuffle in 2018 which placed all PA management under the responsibility of the NFGA in the newly created MNR and President Xi's call to step up ecological protection and civilisation. The policy framework has also improved, with the introduction of the National Marine Economy Development Plan (2021-2025), which calls for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and the adoption of the Wetland Environmental Protection Law in June 2022.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The Project remains fully aligned with BD-SP-2 and BD-SP-4 through its efforts to develop MPA networks and improving the policy, strategic and planning framework for MPAs to develop co-management, ecological and social networks in the PRE and YRE.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	The Project's relevance in the YRE has dramatically increased due to the national government's decision to create the YRE National Park to be officially launched in 2023 and which will absorb five of the six MPAs supported by Project 045. In addition, the Project is supporting the restoration and conservation of crucial habitats for almost 4% of the world's bird species and endangered species such as the Chinese White Dolphin and Oriental White Stork, among others. Qi'ao Mangrove Nature

<sup>2</sup> See rating scheme at the end of the document.

<sup>3</sup> Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

		Reserve is committed to becoming a blue carbon model for China and globally.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	The Prodoc listed potential synergies with other relevant projects, but these did not materialise due to a delay of ten years in starting implementation from the date when these synergies were identified in 2010. New opportunities for synergies with other GEF-funded projects has not materialised beyond <i>ad hoc</i> visits to the Poyang Lake to participate in the International Bird week supported by Project 052. Positive developments include: (i) signing up to the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 to identify opportunities for scientific cooperation; (ii) exploring networking with the GEF-funded project, “Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity” executed by the NFGA with the support of UNDP; (iii) PEC members coordinating coastal management activities with the GEF-funded project, “Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Phase II” also implemented by UNDP.
<b>B. EFFECTIVENESS</b>		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	Accepting implementation started from the inception workshop in June 2020 (and not from the EOD in June 2017), the Project has made good progress in all four of its main components and in some cases has achieved/exceeded targets, especially on restoration and education outreach targets for both estuaries. This has been achieved in spite of the challenges of the government’s zero tolerance policy on COVID-19 outbreaks.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	Delivery has been satisfactory with around 48% of planned outputs delivered, or in the process of delivery to 30/09/2022. Progress is most evident in the YRE, where the Project’s actions support the creation of the YRE National Park.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes <sup>4</sup> and project objectives	MS	There is evidence the Project is starting to deliver a reversal in the loss of critical habitats that are crucial to restoring, conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity in the PRE and YRE developing the policy, strategic and planning framework to

<sup>4</sup> Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		establish MPA networks, which in the case of the YRE will largely be absorbed into the YRE National Park, and on restoration of habitats and education outreach. However, multi-sector coordination mechanisms still need to be strengthened, especially in the PRE and absence of long-term capacity development and law enforcement plans to support MPA networking and management are were not identified by the MTR team
- Outcome 1 (Component 1)	S	The Project is making good progress in establishing a more integrated policy, planning and regulatory framework needed to support and guide the development and management of the MPA networks. Work on how the MPA management teams will implement the framework documents in their management plans still needs clarifying in the PRE, while in the YRE the YRE National Park will have its own management plan that will cover a wider area than the MPA network (approximately 351,799 ha). The main gap is the need for long-term capacity development and law enforcement framework plans, which are gaps in Component 1 of Prodoc.
- Outcome 2 (Component 2)	HS	The Project has made very good progress in starting the process of halting and reversing the degradation of the habitats and biodiversity in the MPA networks. Intra coordination mechanisms are in place to share data between MPAs, METT scores are improving in all MPAs and restoration work in critical coastal and seascapes in the PRE (mangroves) and YRE (wetlands) using native species of mangroves and wetland grasses have already exceeded the targets.
- Outcome 3 (Component 3)	S	Good progress has been made in identifying threats to the ecological health of the MPA networks and there is evidence public investment has increased substantially in support of ecological protection and civilisation, especially in the YRE, where public investment is supporting the work associated with the creation of the YRE National Park in 2023. However, multi-sector coordination mechanisms are not evident so far to support common approaches to key issues such as ecological monitoring, or law enforcement. Also, development of monitoring of

		socio-economic threats to accompany eco-monitoring was not evident.
- Outcome 4 (Component 4)	S	Triangulated evidence confirms good progress has been made in raising the awareness of local communities on the importance of estuarine ecological goods and services to their livelihoods and local economy. Six volunteer groups have been established and community actions such as beach clean-ups and public safety have taken place, which are already surpassing targets. Education outreach with school children, teachers and parents has already exceeded targets with close to 1,800 individuals estimated to have benefitted directly from Project activities. However, no international training courses and exchanges have taken place, and only two of the ten in-country workshops have been realised, in part due to restrictions on travel due the continuation of the zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	The Project will not be able to achieve its objective by the current closure date (03/02/2023), but if extended to complete 60 months of execution (to mid-2025), there is significant evidence to indicate it can achieve its objective.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	UA	Not rated in MTRs
<b>C. EFFICIENCY</b>		
C1. Efficiency <sup>5</sup>	HS	Since the inception workshop, the Project is demonstrating it can transform its resources into results in a timely and efficient manner. Overall physical progress (48%) has been achieved in just 27.5 months of operations since the inception workshop in June 2020 and using only 22.5 per cent of the GEF budget (USD 791,489), although actual expenditure including pending payments amounts to around 30% of GEF funds. Also impressive is that for every US Dollar of GEF expenditure, the Project has leveraged USD 35 in cash and in-kind payments (USD 37,037,641), which is highly satisfactory. A significant proportion of this co-finance (USD 29 m.) has been spent in the YRE in support of the development t of the YRE National Park.

<sup>5</sup> Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks affecting sustainability	ML	The MTR team found the PMO and FAO have paid insufficient attention to developing effective risk management and that this has contributed to underestimating some major risks, some of which have been identified in the METT assessment and the threat analysis conducted in 2020-2021. In addition, triangulated evidence confirms two risks could have a bearing on the sustainability of the MPA networks: (i) a lack of cross-sector mechanisms to manage overlapping mandates and laws of different institutions within the jurisdictions of the MPA networks; (ii) insufficient attention to integrating adaptive management capacity into restoration and conservation of MPA networks to build resilient estuarine ecosystems and communities.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Although financial risks are low, witnessed by substantial co-finance and the fact the new YRE National Park is projected to have a five-year budget in the order of CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion), long-term funding of the PRE MPA network is not clear, especially as there is no long-term capacity development plan to provide clarity on the funding needed to support the development to co-management, ecological, social networks in the PRE. Funding of law enforcement networks is also unclear due to the absence of a long-term law multi-sector law enforcement plan.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Socio-political risks have, on the one hand, been mitigated by the government reshuffle, which has clarified the political mandate of the /Natural Protected Areas Department within the MNR/NFGA to concentrate on management, while the political mandate of MEE has been clarified to only concentrate on monitoring and assessments of PA management. Similarly, the stepping-up of ecological civilisation has increased investment in environmental education. On the other hand, the reshuffle did not cover the cross-sector cooperation mechanisms to be developed at all levels, but especially at the provincial and municipal levels, which have received more devolved powers and are expected to deliver ecological civilisation.

D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Institutional risks are considered moderate. The gap analysis for the PRE has not been completed to guide the Project's approach to key issues such as the need for more cross-sector planning at the provincial and municipal levels in areas such as monitoring and law enforcement. Moreover, although the dissolution of SOA resulted in the transfer of ecological monitoring to MEE, the country's three marine monitoring centres (such as the South China Sea Monitoring Centre which is responsible for the PRE.) remain autonomous.
D1.4. Environmental risks	ML	The Project has a strong focus on restoring and conserving the ecological functions of the estuarine ecosystems of PRE an YRE, but has underestimated the risks associated with the effects of climate variability and change. Indeed, the UN Secretary General has recently stated at the COP27 that "Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible".
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	The Project has demonstrated that its education outreach activities, promotion of eco-tourism services and support to some eco-friendly production methods by the private sector (for example, mitten crab and closed production of selected sea fish species that treat waste water) can reduce environmental impact on coastal wetland habitats. Lessons from these and other initiatives have been incorporated into the investment strategies prepared by Project 045 to promote sustainable business development in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities. However, catalysing private investment has not been adequately addressed so far in these strategies. Catalysing/replicating research and marine restoration activities is not yet evident, but opportunities are likely to arise through the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 and through the MoU to be signed with the GEF6-funded project supporting MPA management along the Southeast coast of China.
<b>E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE</b>		

E1. Project design and readiness <sup>6</sup>	MS	The Project's design is outdated considering it dates back to 2010 and is in need of updating, although a large number of the planned outputs have stood the test of time well and remain highly relevant. The most important updating concerns the RM, which was found to have shortcomings in both the vertical and horizontal causal logic. In particular outcomes (results) are not supported by a Theory of Change, are too numerous to support effective results monitoring and not very coherent with outputs. Also, indicators have no baselines and often are confused with targets.
E2. Quality of project implementation	S	The MTR team found the overall quality of training and outputs under all components was found to meet local/national standards, enhance ecological civilisation (at all levels) and satisfy the needs and aspirations of participants.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MS	The quality of FAO's oversight has been affected by external factors, in particular the government reshuffle in 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prevented travel of FAO-R and FAO-RAP staff to China. The government reshuffle coupled with the introduction of the OPIM modality in 2017 has resulted in a lot of time and transactions being dedicated to amending and applying the EA in line with the risk ratings applied by two fiduciary assessments. In addition, FAO-CN is no longer required to provide any technical support duties since the conclusion of the EA in 2017. However, there is no CTA, which means FAO-CN and the PMO rely heavily on the LTO. However, the LTO has been unable to visit China due to the Zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19. This situation has been further compounded by the fact FAO-CN provides no technical oversight to the Project and, instead, relies on the LTO, based in FAO-RAP.
E2.2 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The PSC took time to mobilise due to the delays caused by the government reshuffle, but since 2020 the PSC has met regularly and provided timely support and guidance. This is aided by the fact there are Guangdong and Shandong Provincial representatives of MNR in the PSC. Oversight by the

<sup>6</sup> This refers to factors affecting the project's ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		PEC was found to be satisfactory in terms of providing adequate levels of quality assurance, but only moderately satisfactory in supporting the PMO address the abovementioned gaps and the development of synergies with other projects.
E3. Quality of project execution	S	The quality of the Project's execution by NFGA/Department of Natural PAs was found to be satisfactory, with no evidence to suggest it has affected the Project's performance. However, because the PSC has no cross-sector representation (in particular from MEE, or the Bureau of Fisheries which continues to be responsible for the conservation of marine animals such as dolphins), communication and lobbying of support from different sectors is dependent on the PSC members adopting proactive positions. The MTR team found they have limited time to assume such tasks.
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMO and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	S	The PMO has a highly qualified team leader who has in-depth work experience in managing and administrating projects and who is also well connected, especially with stakeholders in Dongying municipality, thanks to FIO's offices being located in nearby Qingdao City in Shandong Province. However, the PMO team of five (including an intern) is regularly overloaded with work, because it lacks key personnel, especially a CTA and M&E specialist. Capacity in developing and applying an effective gender and risk management strategy is also low.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	Financial management of GEF funds was found to be satisfactory, although the MTR team found the PMO cannot under the rules of MNR/FIO cannot advance funds to the MPA management teams and other participating institutions under current rules and regulations. As a result, all activities have to be reimbursed with GEF funds, which incurs delays.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	The Project has secured an internal information sharing MoU between all the MPA management teams in the PRE and YRE, but this is not being applied effectively so far, because the coordination mechanisms have yet been consolidated (with a secretariat with the powers to execute and follow-up on decisions taken). At the GEF portfolio level FAO-CN has not supported the establishment of formal synergies with other GEF-funded projects in China that have areas of mutual interest (such as

		the River and Lake Health Assessments applied by Project 057, or wetland restoration strategies applied by Projects 052 and 048). However, a MoU is in the process of development between Project 045 and the project supporting MPA management along the Southeast coast of China and, potentially, with the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Phase II project implemented by UNDP.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	The PMO has produced a large number of knowledge products such as reference and text books for school children and the GIS system under development will provide password access to a large amount of data and maps on the PRE and YRE for stakeholders, universities and research institutions. The Project also has a WeChat service to allow youths access to environmental information. However, the PMO needs more support and training on knowledge management to develop a more effective communication strategy with other relevant GEF-funded projects in order to target different audiences in a more coordinated manner in order to bring about change.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	The quality of the M&E is moderately satisfactory, because it is obliged to track outcomes, outputs and indicators in the Prodoc that are in urgent need of updating, clarifying and simplifying.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	M&E design includes a checks-and-balances approach, whereby information has to first undergo review from the PEC and then the PMO, before it can enter the system. A major weakness in the design is that it only focuses on quantitative indicators that, as mentioned above, refer more to targets. There are no qualitative targets to encourage stakeholders and end beneficiaries to participate in surveys and spot checks to determine potential for transformational change (such as through KAP surveys).
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The M&E plan is implemented as a team effort involving all of the PMO's staff. However, it was not designed by an M&E specialist through which data is processed and validated to support decision-making in at the provincial, municipal and MPA levels.

E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	S	Overall, three factors need to be addressed if the Project is to fully achieve its objective. First, the Project design needs to be reviewed by stakeholders and gaps/shortcomings addressed. Second, FAO-CN is no longer required to provide any technical oversight, which instead should be covered by a CTA (who has not been recruited to date) and the LTO, (who has been unable to visit the Project due to the COVID-19 pandemic). This has contributed to delays in the implementation of some activities under Component 4 concerning international training and exchanges. Moreover, because FAO-CN has limited funds its ability to carry out regular site visits has been severely restricted to mission per year. Third, formal synergies with other GEF-funded projects managed by FAO have not materialised so far and are only in their early stages with relevant GEF6-funded project managed by UNDP. As such opportunities to carry out joint planning, data assessments and review of results and lessons learned/good practices have not materialised so far.
<b>F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS</b>		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The Prodoc has completely overlooked the importance on integrating gender equality into the Project's design, in order groups such as women have equal access to training, information and resources. As a result, the PSC, PEC and all but two MPA managers are women. The PMO has, however, conducted monitoring of women's participation at the local level, where data indicates the average participation rate of women in training activities is around 27 per cent, which is below the recommended rate in GEF and FAO Guidelines.
F2. Human rights issues	MS	This issue is a very sensitive topic in China and was not analysed. However, the MTR team did not identify any substantial evidence to indicate any end beneficiary had been forced to participate against their will in the Project's activities, or that their basic rights had been violated.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	MS	The Project was designed before the ESS became mandatory. A cross-check by the MTR team indicates the Project design falls short on ESS-1

		(building resilience to climate change) and ESS-8 (gender equality).
<b>Overall project rating</b>		<b>S</b>

*Ratings: Highly satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately satisfactory (MS), Moderately unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U) Highly unsatisfactory (HU) Unable to assess (UA). Additional ratings for Section E: Likely (L), Moderately likely (ML), Moderately unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U)*

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Purpose and scope of the MTR

26. The mid-term review (MTR) of project GCP/CPR/045/GFF (GEF Identity number 4175), '*Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China*', hereafter referred to as "Project 045", was launched in September 2022 in line with the provisions in the project document (Prodoc). The terms of reference (ToR) of the MTR stipulate **the main purposes of the MTR** are to: (i) provide accountability (respond to the information needs and interests of water resource management authorities of different levels and other actors with decision-making powers); (ii) improve project management by providing valuable information (findings, conclusions and recommendations) to project managers (implementing partners), in particular in the PSC, PMO and PEC as well as to FAO stakeholders such the GEF Coordination Unit (GCU); (iii) contribute to the development of the project's knowledge base to the benefit of all current and future stakeholders.
27. The TOR specify that the **scope of the MTR** covers all aspects of the project's implementation from the entry of duty (EOD), on 12 June 2017 to 30 September 2022. In geographical terms the scope of the MTR is to cover its interventions in the Pearl and Yellow River estuaries (PRE and YRE) located in Guangdong and Shandong Provinces. To this end the MTR team has placed heavy importance on selecting a wide sample of stakeholders and end beneficiaries (men and women) to help triangulate its main findings and substantiate its conclusions and recommendations. The list of stakeholders and end beneficiaries selected for remote and physical interviews and can be found in Appendix 3.

## 1.2 Objective of the MTR

28. The **objective of the MTR** is to provide valuable recommendations on improving the project's implementation and achievements in relation to the following evaluation criteria applied by GEF/FAO: project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, factors affecting performance and level of application of cross-cutting priorities in accordance with GEF/FAO policies on gender equality, the rights of ethnic minorities and environmental and social standards. The lead questions to support the review of the above-mentioned criteria are summarised in Box 1 below.
29. To support the MTR, address these questions and complete the GEF Rating Table (see Appendix 8), a Review Matrix (RM), also known as Evaluation Matrix (EM), was elaborated and approved by the FAO-CN and FAO-GCU during the inception phase (see Appendix 4). The evaluation matrix facilitated the review of the above lead questions in line with the questions listed in the GEF/FAO MTR Guidelines (see Appendix 4).

### Box 1: Main questions for the MTR

<b>1. Relevance</b>	Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?
<b>2. Effectiveness</b>	To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?
<b>3. Efficiency</b>	To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?
<b>4. Sustainability</b>	What is the likelihood that project results can be sustained beyond the project?
<b>5. Factors affecting progress</b>	<p>Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives? Key factors to be assessed:</p> <p>Design: is the project's design suited to delivering the expected outcomes?</p> <p>Implementation delays: Is the project on track as it was originally designed?</p> <p>Execution and implementing partners: To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project? How well is the PMO functioning and did the OPIM contribute to ownership and sustainability of the project's results?</p> <p>Are there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation and does it have the capacity to support project implementation.</p> <p>What have been the financial-management challenges of the project?</p> <p>To what extent has FAO delivered supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution?</p> <p>To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and the private sector, been involved in project formulation and implementation?</p> <p>How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience?</p> <p>Does the M&amp;E system operate per the M&amp;E plan?</p>
<b>6. Cross-cutting priorities</b>	<p>Gender priorities: To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project?</p> <p>Environmental priorities: To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p>
<b>7. Lessons learned (added by MTR team)</b>	What lessons and good practices are likely to be replicated or scaled up during and soon after the project's closure?

### 1.3 *Intended users*

30. In line with the MTR's ToR and Stakeholder Analysis conducted during the inception phase, the main users of this MTR report are:

- The counterpart institutions in the People's Republic of China (PRC) who are participating directly in the Project's Steering Committee and who oversee the project's execution and implementation. The following government institutions are involved: (i) the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Finance (GEF Focal Point in China); (ii) the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (NFGA), which is part of the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR); (iii) the First Institute for Oceanography (FIO), operating under the NFGA; (iv) the Dongying Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries in Shandong Provincial Government and the Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries in Guangdong Provincial Government.
- The GEF Secretariat, FAO (member of the PSC) and other UN agencies who are engaged in the restoration, conservation and management of protected areas, in particular related to estuarine habitats and their biodiversity.
- The Project management office (PMO) operating within the FIO and who is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of Project 045 in accordance with the work plans and budgets approved by the Project Steering Committee;
- University and research establishments involved in the project's implementation;
- Civil society organisations, in particular local inhabitants in and around the project sites in the PRE and YRE who are participating and/or directly benefiting from the project's actions.
- Other institutions in PRC who have an indirect interest in the project's outputs and outcomes. In particular the: (i) the Department for Policy and Planning; (ii) the Department of Marine Environmental Protection; and (iii) the Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE), which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2030 (NBCSAP);

### 1.4 *Methodology*

31. The **objective of the MTR** is to provide valuable recommendations on improving the project's implementation and achievements in relation to the following evaluation criteria applied by GEF/FAO: project relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, factors affecting performance and level of application of cross-cutting priorities in accordance with GEF/FAO policies on gender equality, the rights of ethnic minorities and environmental and social standards.

32. The **MTR team** is comprised of two consultants; one international consultant and one national consultant. The international consultant, Mr. Warren Olding, has over 20 years work experience in project management, conducting external evaluations relating to

natural resources management, biodiversity conservation and sustainable rural development (includes FAO/GEF-funded projects). The national consultant, Mr Longqing Fan has over 25 years' experience in natural resources management and biodiversity conservation. His core areas of expertise are natural resources management and community co-management as well as project management. His work experience includes manager of a GEF-funded project implemented by UNDP supporting the strengthening of the protected area system in Qinghai Province, China and currently performs as CTA for the GEF-UNDP projects, 'Strengthening the PA system in the Qilian Mountains-Qinghai Lake landscape' and 'Enhancing conservation of globally significant biodiversity through protected area system strengthening in Gansu'. Since 2020, he has conducted MTRs of GEF-funded projects implemented by FAO in China.

33. The **work methodology** applied by the MTR was applied in accordance with three main phases of the MTR as follows:

- An Inception phase incorporating a desk review: the work methodology focused on: (i) conducting the kick-off meeting (briefing) on 29/09/2022, in which the PMO presented an overview of the project's progress, achievements, challenges and recommendations and the GCU presented a summary of the MTR process and guidelines; (ii) elaborating a draft theory of change (ToC) for the project to be reviewed by main stakeholders in the field phase. The final version of the ToC can be found in Appendix 9; (iii) applying participatory stakeholder analysis (Appendix 3), which facilitated the identification of the sample of stakeholders and direct beneficiaries that were interviewed either remotely or directly by the national consultant in the field; (iv) establishing the MTR's review matrix (RM), which guided the MTR's interviews of stakeholders in accordance with the provisions in its ToR, which can be found in Appendix 1.
- Remote interview/Field Phase: the work methodology consisted of: (i) conducting the remote semi-structured interviews of the stakeholders selected in Appendix 2 using TenCent and Zoom applications. In order to interview as many stakeholders as possible, the majority of remote interviews involved focal group discussions (FGD), which helped bring stakeholders together to also learn from each other on their activities, findings, lessons, good practices, etc.; (ii) conducting physical interviews in the field to support triangulation of findings. These interviews were conducted in Chinese by the national consultant according to a set of the most applicable questions established in the RM.<sup>7</sup> In all cases interviews and site visits were conducted in full compliance with FAO's Guidelines on gender equality. Overall, the MTR team can confirm 27 per cent of interviewees were women, youths or people with disabilities; (iii) collecting photographic and any other supporting evidence through the PMO and the national consultant's site visits.

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<sup>7</sup> The international consultant was unable to visit PRC due to the strict COVID-19 rules and regulations in place.

- Synthesis/reporting phase: a wrap-up meeting was held by the MTR team on the preliminary findings and conclusions of the MTR team at the start of the synthesis phase. It involved representatives from FAO-GCU, FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, the PMO and the PSC. Following this meeting, the MTR team prepared and finalised the present report, which will be disseminated to main stakeholders for their comments and observations.

### 1.5 Limitations

34. The main limitation of the MTR has been the continuation of strict quarantine rules for international travellers entering PRC due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This obliged the MTR team leader to rely on a combination of homebased analysis of documents, remote interviews and sending the national consultant into the field to conduct physical interviews with local stakeholders and beneficiaries. To help mitigate this limitation, the MTR focused on conducting a higher number of online focal group discussions and direct contact with the PMO than would have otherwise been the case.
  35. A second limitation was the vast majority of the information generated by the project is in Chinese. As a result, the remote interview process was challenging in three ways. First, the assessment of these documents and presentations had to be limited to selected documents and key points only. Second, heavy reliance on interpreters meant some of the MTR questions and answers were limited by “lost in translation”, especially where the interpreter had to deal with complex issues, such as on MPA monitoring systems. Third, the reliance on interpreting services reduced the time available for questions and analysis. To mitigate this, interview times were extended by as much as two additional hours and key points or issues identified were noted for additional review. This consisted of both follow-up meetings with the PMO, or requested the national consultant to include a review of these points during the field missions to Guangdong and Shandong Provinces.
  36. Finally, due to the vertical nature of China’s political system, some data and documents, especially on ecological monitoring, could not be shared with the international consultant.
- Finally, the MTR team wishes to point out that the global impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which has caused an energy and cost of living crisis in many countries, did not limit the MTR process in PRC in any significant manner.

## 2 Project background and context

### 2.1 *Threats and barriers being addressed by the project*

37. The Prodoc highlights China has more than 1,500 rivers with significant basin drainage areas three of which are over 450,000 km<sup>2</sup> in area (Yellow, Pearl and Yangtze Rivers). These drainage areas have evolved to establish “discrete estuarine ecosystems” that are highly productive and biologically rich. However, these ecosystems are under increasing threats associated with the rapid growth of residential, commercial and industrial development and the associated maritime transport that has increased to support this growth. The Prodoc identified the following main threats to the country’s river estuaries in 2010: (i) the reduction of freshwater inflows due to upstream diversions and impoundments; (ii) pollution loading associated with local and offsite industrialization and urbanization; (iii) non-sustainable use of natural resources such as fishery resources; and (iv) habitat loss caused by human activity, in particular linked to urban and industrial expansion. At that time, the effects of climate change (especially flooding and droughts) were flagged as a risk in the Prodoc, but were not considered a major threat to the habitats and biodiversity of estuarine ecosystems, or on the sustainability of the abovementioned urban and economic growth in these ecosystems.
38. Major barriers to establishing collective responses to these threats in China’s estuarine ecosystems in 2010 included, among others: (i) a weak (national and sub-national) policy framework in place to halt biodiversity loss in these ecosystems; (ii) the lack of inclusion of biodiversity conservation criteria in local, regional and national socio-economic development plans (that recognise and value the protection, restoration, conservation and sustainable use of the ecological goods and services that estuarine ecosystems provide); (iii) an absence of effective inter-institutional coordination mechanisms needed to address the threats cited above at all levels of government; (iv) fragmented monitoring mandates resulting in low levels of collaboration and sharing of data that constrain a clear understanding of the ecological “health” of these ecosystems; (v) low capacity to manage effectively estuarine and marine protected areas to conserve biodiversity of global significance; (vi) a general lack of awareness and recognition of the economic, social and environmental value of estuarine biodiversity among policy and decision-makers and the general public.
39. In response to these threats and barriers, the State Council approved a number of reforms and initiatives, including the adoption of: (i) the National Wetland Conservation Programme (2003); (ii) the National Wetland Strategy (2004); (iii) the National Ocean Development Framework Plan (2008). The latter called for the establishment of a network of MPAs to support the conservation of critical habitats, the restoration of wetlands, the control invasive species and the establishment of a national marine ecosystem monitoring network. Moreover, the implementation of these initiatives was supported in the 11<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2006-2010); namely the improvement of environmental quality in PRC. These developments were instrumental in defining the identification of Project 045 in 2009, and the subsequent agreement to specifically support the development of MPA networks to conserve biodiversity of national and global importance.

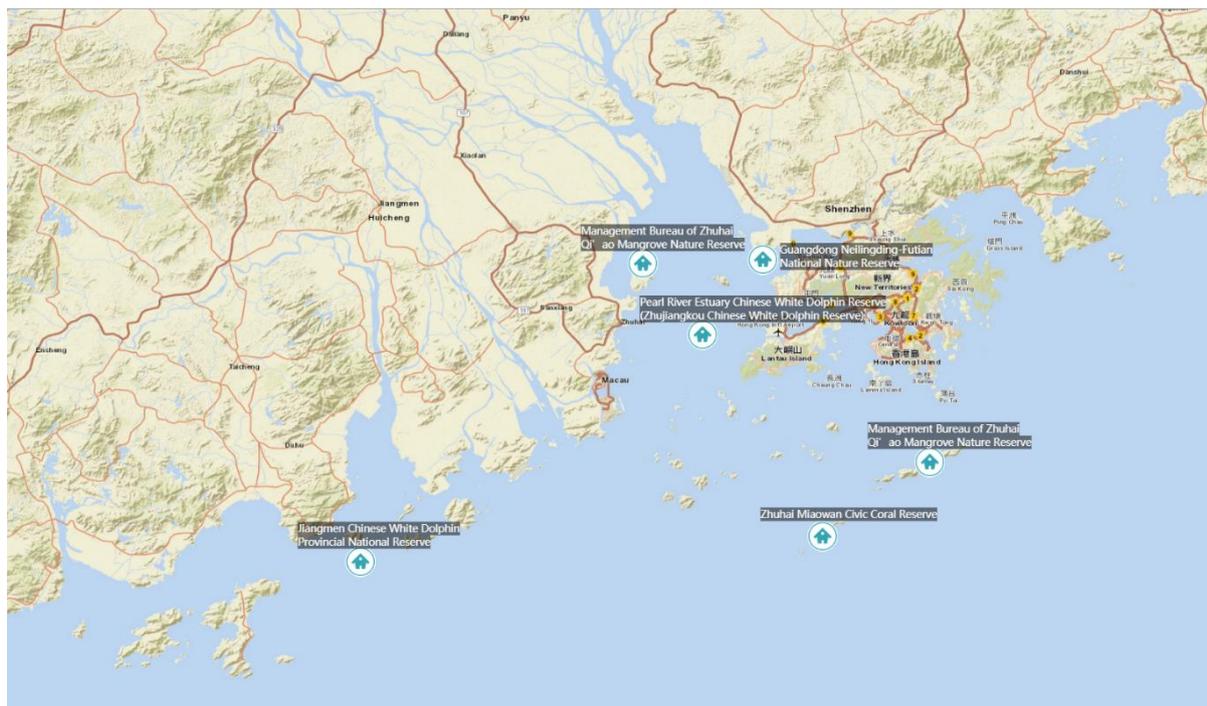
### 2.2 *Project description*

40. A summary of the project is provided in Box 2, followed by maps of the project's intervention areas in Guangdong and Shandong Provinces.

### Box 2. Project summary

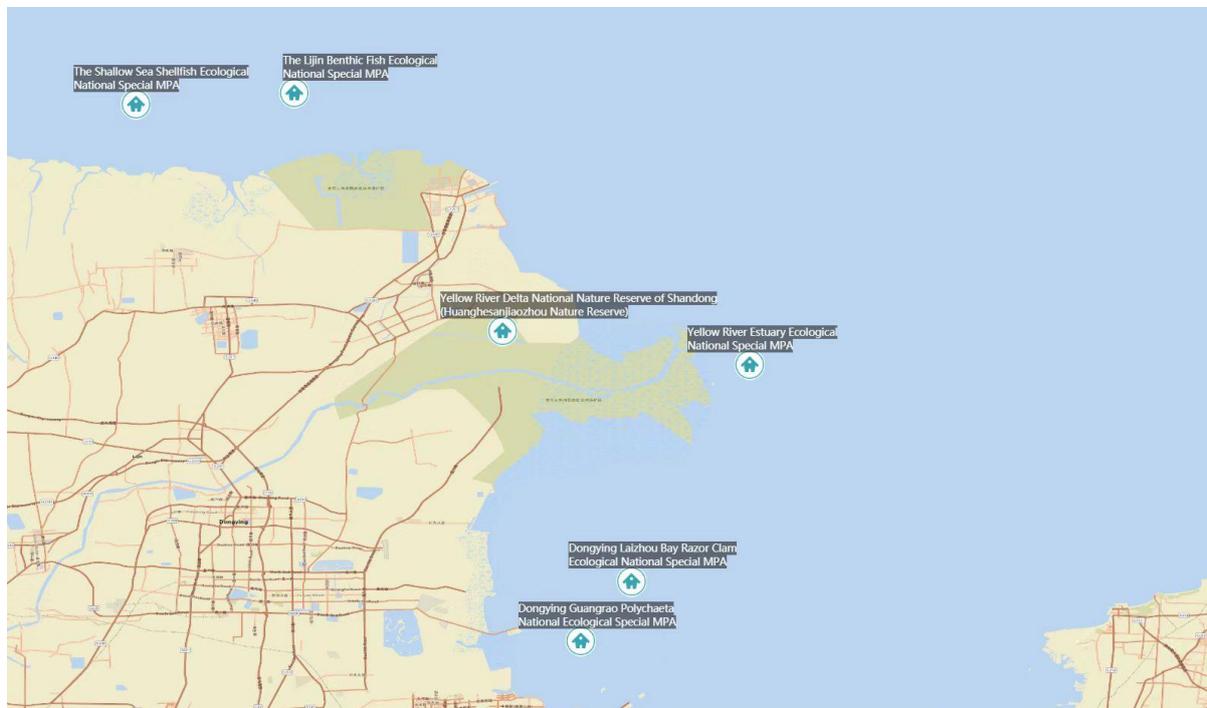
**GEF Project ID:** 4175.  
**FAO Project ID:** GCP/CPR/045/GFF  
**GEF 4 focal area(s):** BD-SP 2 (Increasing Representation of Effectively Managed Marine Protected Areas in Protected Area Systems); BD-SP 4 (Strengthening the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity).  
**FAO Strategic Objectives (at start date):** SO-E (Sustainable Management of Forests and Trees); SO-F (Sustainable Management and Utilization of Natural Resources, including Land, Water, Air, Climate and Genetic Resources, for the Benefit of Present and Future Generations).  
**Latest FAO Strategic objectives – The Four Betters (2022-2030):** No 3: Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and combat climate change. Priority area: Biodiversity and ecosystem services for food and agriculture;  
**CPF 2016-2020:** Priority Area 1: Fostering sustainable and climate resilient agricultural development and facilitating China's regional and international agriculture cooperation.  
**Total budget:** USD 15,361,480  
**GEF allocation:** USD 3,516,400  
**Co-funding allocation (in cash and in-kind):** USD 11,845,080 (USD 698,604 from National Gov.; USD 6,772,135 from Guangdong Prov. Gov.; USD 4,142,127 from Shandong Prov. Gov.; USD 232,214 from FAO).  
**Date of CEO endorsement:** 22 February 2013.  
**Entry of duty (start date):** 12 June 2017 (Inception workshop: 23 June 2020)  
**Receipt of first instalment:** May 2018 (USD 175,820).  
**Implementation end date:** 11 June 2022 (extended to 03 Feb. 2023).  
**Executing agency:** National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (Ministry of Natural Resources) and the First Institute of Oceanography (FIO)  
**Implementing agency:** FAO  
**Implementation modality:** OPIM/project management office in FIO  
**Country and geographic locations:** China – six Marine Protected Areas in the Yellow River Estuary (YRE) in Shandong Province: (i) YRDNNR; (ii) DEE-NSMPA; (iii) and the Pearl River Estuary (PRE), in Guangdong Province  
**Project's goal:** to improve existing efforts to conserve biodiversity in China's major estuarine ecosystems.  
**Project's specific objective:** to mainstream the conservation of estuarine biodiversity in economic sector development plans and develop a series of "best practices" based on experiences derived from project supported field activities focusing on the creation of protected area networks and wetland conservation and restoration in the Yellow and Pearl River Estuaries.  
**Main stakeholders:** FIO, NFGA, MNR, Department of the Natural Resources of Shandong Province, Forestry Administration of Guangdong Province, local communities living in YRE and PRE.  
**Key technical partners:** Project Expert Committee comprising experts from FIO, Forestry University of Beijing, Wetlands International China, University of Fuzhou, Chinese Academy of Sciences (Qingdao Institute of Bioenergy and Bioprocess Technology), University of Shantou, Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences (South China Sea Fisheries Research Institute and National Marine Environmental Monitoring Centre)  
**Project status:** implementation delays, new extension required pending results of the MTR.

**Figure 1: Map of the intervention area in the Pearl River Estuary, Guangdong Province**



Source: PMO

**Figure 2: Map of the intervention area in the Yellow River Estuary, Shandong Province**



Source: PMO

### 3 Theory of change

41. The project was designed in 2009 prior to the application of the theory of change (ToC). Under these circumstances the MTR team proceeded to construct its interpretation of the ToC in the inception phase, paying particular attention to the current context in PRC, while at the same time ensuring coherence with the environmental and development objectives of GEF-4. The draft ToC presented in the Inception Report (IR) was reviewed during the field phase by key stakeholders. The final version of the ToC can be found in Appendix 9.
42. The ToC has been constructed following a review of the main outputs, outcomes, objective and goal provided in the Prodoc. The MTR team started by reviewing the project's potential long-term impact to 2030 (to achieve Project 045's goal - *to improve existing efforts to conserve biodiversity in China's major estuarine ecosystems*). In this way, the ToC could be set within the context of the 2030 Agenda. The MTR team concluded that the project's **potential impact** (and the tangible ways to measure it) should be aligned with the latest priorities and thinking within China (following consultations with key stakeholders from the PEC, PMO and FAO). The MTR team concluded that Project 045's impact should be measured in terms of how far:
  - National, provincial and municipal governments shift to co-management of PA networks that support the protection, conservation and sustainable use of the ecological goods and services of the whole river ecosystem (from its upper reaches to their estuaries and immediate coastal area). At the same time this approach supports informed decision-making on rolling-out this approach in other major rivers of PRC. This could be measured through monitoring of the growth of the PA system in the Pearl and Yellow Rivers, as well as the level of public and private investment in river basin co-management approaches in PRC on an annual basis to 2030;
  - Ecological civilisation and human development increases among inhabitants and their communities in the YRE and PRE as they increasingly reap the economic, social and environmental benefits of protecting, conserving and sustainably using the ecological goods and services of these estuarine ecosystems. This could be measured by conducting economic surveys, application of the Human Development Index (HDI) and ecological health assessments, among others;
  - Globally important biological diversity in the YRE and PRE (and in other estuarine ecosystems in PRC) is restored, conserved and sustainably used and whether this contributes to increasing ecological goods and services in the wider river ecosystem. This could be measured by independent reviews and national/provincial monitoring of the ecological health index (EHI), ecosystem assessments, analysis of species removed from the critically endangered and endangered Red List of species and ecosystems managed by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and growth in, for example, payment for ecosystem services (PES).
43. Similarly, to achieve this impact, the MTR team found it necessary to update and rework Project 045's outcomes into one immediate outcome by component (to be achieved before the Project ends) together with its wider outcome expected after the Project has ended. These are described as follows:

- **Component 1: Immediate outcome:** *a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework to restore, conserve and sustainably use estuarine ecosystems in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces is applied by main stakeholders, in line with GEF/FAO priorities and the objectives of ecological civilisation in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025). Wider outcome:* *up-scaling and out-scaling of co-management approaches to restore, conserve and sustainably use of estuarine ecosystems in PRC is included in the 15th Five-Year Plan, based on lessons learned and good practices from Project 045 and in line with commitments to achieve national targets linked to the Sustainable Development Goals - Agenda 2030;*
  - **Component 2: Immediate outcome:** *Co-management of MPA networks in the YRE and PRE under a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework leads to the stabilisation and/or increase in their ecological goods and services over time (includes counts of fish eggs, fish larvae, migratory birds, carbon storage, flood prevention, etc.). Wider outcome:* *local communities and the private sector who support the conservation and sustainable use of the ecological goods and services of YRE and PRE register an improvement in their livelihoods and a reduction in their vulnerability to disasters and the effects of climate change.*
  - **Component 3: Initial outcome:** *YRE & PRE register a net rise in public participation and economic investment dedicated to restoring, conserving and promoting the sustainable use of their ecological goods and services, aided by eco-monitoring data to support informed decision-making on where to target resources in the MPA networks. Wider outcome:* *YRE & PRE register a net rise in private investment dedicated to the sustainable use of ecological goods and services, social development of local communities and good governance within the MPA network.*
  - **Component 4: Initial outcome:** *The number of people/civil society organisations participating to protect, restore, conserve, monitor and sustainably use the ecological goods and services of YRE and PRE increases each year starting from 2021. Wider outcome:* *The growth of data and the knowledge base on the economic, social and environmental benefits of MPAs increases civil society's commitments to protect and conserve them and a reduction of illegal practices.*
44. Finally, concerning **component 5**, it was agreed that the expected outcomes are limited to the project's lifetime and relate to tasks to be fulfilled by the PMO. As such, the main expected outcome of component 5 is to ensure the project's M&E system inspires and guides national and sub-national partners in PRE and YRE to develop their own M&E systems to support the achievement of outcomes 1-4 above. This outcome has been reviewed in sub-section 4.5.7.

## 4 Key findings and MTR questions

### 4.1 Relevance

**MTR question 1 – Are the project outcomes congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?**

**Finding 1.** The government’s reshuffle in 2018 has increased the relevance of the Project’s outcomes and objective, by removing the fragmented nature of Protected Area management. This has greatly improved the political and institutional context for Project 045 to operate, because the majority of its main stakeholders are now operating under one government institution (the Ministry of Natural Resources) at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

**Finding 2:** The current political and institutional context has strengthened the Project’s opportunity to achieve GEF and FAO objectives and make an important contribution to achieving relevant targets under Sustainable Development Goal 14 by 2030.

#### 4.1.1 Strategic relevance of the project’s expected outcomes (components 1-3)

45. The majority of stakeholders interviewed from PRC and FAO stated that the project’s relevance is higher today than when it was endorsed by the GEF Secretariat in 2013. First, the **new institutional framework** established following the completion of the government reshuffle in 2018, has removed a number overlapping mandates concerning the planning and management of protected areas in China prior to 2018. For example:

- The Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) was created to oversee and improve the coordination between a number of government institutions whose mandates to manage the country’s natural resources and protected areas (PAs) are now under the overall control of the National Forestry and Grasslands Administration (NFGA) within MNR. These included the former Ministry of Land and Resources, the State Oceanic Administration (SOA), the First Institute for Oceanography (FIO), the State Forestry and Grasslands Administration and the State Bureau of Surveying and Mapping;
- The Ministry of Ecology and Environment (MEE) was created to oversee the formulation and implementation of national ecological and environmental policies, strategies and plans, as well as draft laws and regulations to protect, monitor and report on the state of the country’s natural resources. These include controlling and monitoring of pollution of freshwater river systems and coastal sea areas, halting the loss of biodiversity and habitats, controlling emissions into the atmosphere and supporting improvements in environmental governance, among others;

- The Coast Guard of China was transferred from civilian control of the State Council and SOA to the People's Armed Police Force. As a result, law enforcement of illegal activities in and around MPAs was strengthened under the Command of the Central Military Commission.
- The functions of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) were updated to support the implementation of the decisions and policies of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. This includes, "*the implementation of sustainable development strategies, advance the construction and reform of ecological civilization, and coordinate ecological and environmental protection and restoration, energy and resource conservation and comprehensive utilization [and] to put forward policies and measures to improve the compensation mechanism for ecological protection, and coordinate the environmental protection industry and clean production.*"<sup>8</sup>

46. The project's first four components continue to demonstrate a high level of relevance with the government's national policy framework currently in place, although outputs linked to Component 5 refer mainly to measures that support the project deliver its outputs and outcomes under components 1-4. Component 1 (Policy, planning and institutional arrangements), demonstrates a high level of congruence with the implementation of a number of important national policies, strategies, plans, regulations and laws that have been approved and are in the process of being applied to protect, conserve and sustainably use the ecological goods and services derived from PAs in China. These include, among others:

- The National Wetland Conservation Programme 2002-2030, which aims to establish 713 wetland PAs that include the MPAs supported by Project 045;
- The National Biodiversity Strategy Conservation and Action Plan 2011-2030 (NBCSAP), which emphasises the need for a new policy and legal framework to ensure biodiversity conservation is integrated into sector development planning, biodiversity monitoring and evaluation is developed and participatory mechanisms and partnerships are established to implement the Biodiversity Partnership and Action Framework (based on co-management);
- The adoption of Management Rules for Wetland Protection (2013), which calls for the establishment of wetland management master plans and lists human activities that are prohibited in wetland PAs, such as damming, draining, land reclamation, grazing, fishing and mining;
- The National Wetland Conservation and Restoration System Plan 2016-2020;
- The National Marine Economy Development Plan (2021-2025), which calls for efforts to be stepped up in the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan to develop the marine economy using new technologies that support the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources;

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<sup>8</sup> Main functions of the NRDC (Point 12), NRDC website (2022)

- The adoption of the Wetland Environmental Protection Law, which came into effect on 01 June 2022 to restrict human activity that degrades wetland habitats and their biodiversity, such as construction projects, the discharge of waste water, land reclamation for agriculture and livestock, among others, in the country's 64 wetland PAs.
47. Similarly, Component 1 is highly relevant to the Provincial governments of Guangdong and Shandong Provinces. This is especially since 2019, when the Central Committee and President Xi called for the stepping up of sustainable, high-quality development and ecological protection, especially in the country's three main river basins - the Yangtze, Yellow and Pearl River basins. In 2021, he officially visited the Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve (YRDNNR) leading to a decision in Shandong Province in 2022 to create a new wetland national park in the YRE.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Project 045 represents both a highly relevant and timely intervention to support both provinces review, finalise and support the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of the PRE and YRE. For example, in Shandong Province, Project 045 is highly relevant in supporting current commitments to develop the following policies, regulations and measures, among others:
- The 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for the Economic and Social Development of Dongying City, supported by a draft Vision Plan to 2035, in which ecological protection of the YRE's Nature Reserve, Geopark, Forest Park, Aquatic Germplasm Resource Reserve, Special Marine Reserve, and Yellow River Delta Wetland is to be prioritised. In addition, specific projects are needed to save rare and endangered animals in the delta through joint-management approaches that encourage local communities to engage in the protection and conservation of the YRE ecosystem.
  - Environmental Protection Regulations for Shandong Province (2021).
  - Regulations on Environmental Impact Assessment for Planning in Shandong Province" which came into effect on 01/01/2022.
  - Sea Area Use Management Regulations for Shandong Province, which came into effect in 2021.
  - Draft regulations on the abandoned oils well found in the Shengli oil field, which is the second largest in PRC and which includes 18 inside the YRE;
  - Draft Interim Measures for the Management of Special MPAs in Shandong Province;
  - Draft Administrative Measures for MPAs in Shandong Province.
  - 14th Five-Year Plan for marine economic development of Guangdong Province.
  - 14th Five-Year Plan for marine economic development of Zhuhai City of Guangdong Province.
  - National 14th Five-Year Plan for Marine Ecological Environmental Protection
48. Meanwhile, the MTR team found almost all interviews confirmed Components 2-4 of Project 045 continue to align with the needs of main stakeholders and beneficiary

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<sup>9</sup> CGTN, Yellow River: A Chinese tale of ecological protection, high-quality development, 21/10/2021.

communities to implement the abovementioned policy, legal and regulatory framework in the PRE and YRE. For example, there is a high level of consensus among main stakeholders interviewed on the benefits of applying MPA networks and co-management approaches foreseen under Component 2, as a means to engaging local communities in the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of their ecological goods and services. Similarly, Components 3 and 4 support learning and capacity development, which are synonymous with advancing ecological civilisation and the protection of strategic natural resources that produce global environmental benefits (GEBs). A review of the Project's design in relation to the current context is provided in sub-section 4.5.1.

#### 4.1.2. Alignment with GEF-4's strategic priorities

49. Triangulation of evidence from a review of the Prodoc and interviews with key stakeholders from FAO confirms the project retains a highly satisfactory level of consistency with the following GEF-4 priority:

- Biodiversity Strategy-Strategic Programme No. 2: (BD-SP-2): *Increasing Representation of Effectively Managed MPAs in PA Systems*. For example, Project 045 has already supported the formulation of two integrated management plans for MPA networks in PRE and YRE. Moreover, Project 045 is supporting the latter establish a network of six MPAs whose management is designed to transition into a fully-fledged National Park authority, if agreed by national and provincial authorities in Shandong.
- Biodiversity Strategy-Strategic Programme No. 4: (BD-SP-4): *Strengthening the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity*. For example, the project actively supports awareness raising exercises and capacity building on the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use in estuarine ecosystems into sector policies, plans and regulatory frameworks at the national level and in Guangdong and Shandong provinces. However, in practice, delivering this is hampered by the lack of representatives from key sectors in the PSC, through which the mainstreaming process could be coordinated.

#### 4.1.3. Alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, FAO's Strategic Objectives and Country Programming Framework 2016-2020.

50. Project 045 responds directly to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that replaced the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. In particular, the project's objectives are fully aligned to the following SDG:

- SDG-14 Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources, in particular Targets 14.2: *By 2020, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts, including by strengthening their resilience, and take action for their restoration in order to achieve healthy and productive oceans*; Target 14.4: *By 2020, effectively regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and destructive fishing*

*practices and implement science-based management plans, in order to restore fish stocks in the shortest time feasible, at least to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yield as determined by their biological characteristics; Target 14.5: By 2020, conserve at least 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, consistent with national and international law and based on the best available scientific information; and Target 14.B, Provide access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets.*

51. In addition, Project 045 supports the achievement of other SDGs, or is dependent on the achievement of Targets of these SDGs to fully achieve its objective and goal. For example,
- SDG-13 Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts, where Project 045 directly supports Target 13.1: *Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries*; and Target 13.3: *Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning*;
  - SDG-15 Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss. In this case, the project is directly dependent on the achievement of the following targets within the drainage systems of the Pearl and Yellow Rivers: Target 15.1: *By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements*"; Target 15.5: *"Take urgent and significant action to reduce the degradation of natural habitats, halt the loss of biodiversity and, by 2020, protect and prevent the extinction of threatened species"*; and Target 15.9: *By 2020, integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts.*
52. In terms of the project's alignment with FAO's five Strategic Objectives (SO) adopted for the period 2010-2021, Project 045 aligns fully with SO-2: *Increase and improve provision of goods and services from agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner* and directly supports the achievement of two expected outcomes identified to meet this objective. They are: (i) outcome 1: *producers and natural resource managers adopt practices that increase and improve the provision of goods and services in agriculture, forestry and fisheries in a sustainable manner*; and (ii) outcome 2: *Stakeholders in member countries strengthen governance – the laws, policies and institutions that are needed to support producers in the transition to sustainable agricultural systems.*<sup>10</sup>

53. The project also remains closely aligned with:

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<sup>10</sup> FAO Strategic Framework 2010-2019.

- The third SO under FAO's latest Strategic Framework for the period 2022 to 2031, which aims to, *protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial and marine ecosystems and combat climate change (reduce, reuse, recycle, residual management) through more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agri-food systems*.<sup>11</sup>
- The Country Programming Frameworks (CPF) for the periods 2011-2015 and 2016-2020. In the former CPF, the Prodoc describes Project 045's contribution to Priority Area 4 *Promoting sustainable agro-ecological development*. In the case of the latter, the MTR found it aligns with Priority Area 1: *Fostering sustainable and climate resilient agricultural development* and supports the achievement of Outcome 1: *China aims to ensure early positive results in sustainable agriculture development by 2020 and notable progress in sustainable agriculture development by 2030*. Among the outputs to achieve this outcome, Output 1.2 was found to be particularly pertinent: *"Biodiversity conservation and development interventions supported to revitalize key forest, water and wetland agro-ecosystems in the country*.<sup>12</sup>

#### 4.1.4 *Complementarity with existing interventions being implemented by UN agencies, or funded by international donors and non-government organisations*

54. The Prodoc provides a specific section (2.3) on the comparative advantage of engaging FAO services to support the Executing Partner (currently NFGA) implement Project 045. In particular it highlights its capacity to draw on lessons learned from the following projects it has managed and/or provided technical assistance. They include:
- The Sustainable Management of Freshwater Aquaculture in Pingjiang County in Hunan Province (2010);
  - The Guangxi Integrated Forestry Development and Conservation Project (2006)
  - The Conservation of Biodiversity in Dryland Ecosystems (2008);
  - The National Sustainable Forestry Development Project, which included PA management (2002)
  - Technical Cooperation Projects (TCP) providing small grants to replicate the proposed project approach to other FAO supported initiatives, both in China and elsewhere.
55. In addition, section 2.5 provides a list of on-going, or recently approved, projects where there is scope for coordination and complementarity. In 2013, they were:
- The Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Programme, funded by GEF and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which identified the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) for the Yellow Sea in 2011. A second

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<sup>11</sup> FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31.

<sup>12</sup> Country Planning Framework 2016-2020, p. 4-5.

phase was approved to implement the SAP between 2016-2021, in which ecosystem-based management of marine ecosystems was a central theme;

- The third phase of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the Seas of East Asia Programme (SDS-SEA III), funded by GEF and implemented by UNDP and the International Maritime Organisation between June 2009 and 2014. In particular, the SDS focused on establishing integrated management and sustainable use of the environment and resources in the SEA, including river basin and coastal area management programmes (including the Yellow River);
- Marine Biodiversity Management Programme II, implemented in the coastal area of China's South Sea (SCCBD) funded by GEF and implemented by UNDP/SOA between 2009 and 2013. Project 045 has drawn on the main findings of the MTR of the project's contribution to: (i) strengthening of institutional capacities in four MPAs in the South Sea; (ii) developing and testing new tools to support conservation of marine biodiversity; and (iii) applying new approaches to sustainably use the ecosystems of each MPA (including one MPA located in Guangdong Province);
- The South China Sea and Gulf of Thailand Programme funded by GEF and implemented by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Project 045 draws on the main findings of the external final evaluation of this project in which China participated in four main activities dedicated to managing and controlling mangroves, sea grasses, wetlands, and land-based pollution in PRE;
- The project, Wetland Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use in China funded by GEF and implemented by UNDP, between 2006 and 2012. In particular Project 045 draws on the main components of the project dedicated to integrating biodiversity conservation into land use plans governing four wetland nature reserves, the adoption of an inter-sectoral planning approach, and public awareness and training.
- Securing biodiversity conservation and sustainable use in China's Dongting Lake Protected Area, agreed for funding by GEF in 2012, and which was implemented by FAO between 2016 and 2019;
- Main Streams of Life – Wetland PA System Strengthening for Biodiversity Conservation funded by GEF and implemented by UNDP under the China Biodiversity Partnership and Framework for Action 2007–2017 (CBPF).
- Conservation of biodiversity and sustainable land management in the soda saline-alkaline wetlands agro pastoral landscapes in the western area of the Jilin Province, funded by GEF and implemented by FAO between 2017 and 2021;
- Piloting a Provincial-Level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province, funded by GEF and implemented by FAO between 2017 and 2023;

56. However, with the exception of the latter, all these interventions have ended and are, therefore no longer relevant. Nonetheless, the MTR identified some newer projects and programmes funded by GEF that are highly relevant to Project 045 and either offer scope

for complementarity, or are in the process of identifying opportunities to cooperate. They are:

- *A new green line: mainstreaming biodiversity conservation objectives and practices into China's water resources management policy and planning* funded by GEF-5 and implemented by FAO between 2017 and 2023. In particular, Project 057 offers opportunities for information exchange and learning on wetland habitat restoration techniques, public awareness raising strategies and on the application of R-LHA and biodiversity monitoring, especially concerning techniques to identify complex organisms, such as fish larvae species;
- *China's Protected Area Reform (C-PAR) for Conserving Globally Significant Biodiversity*, funded by GEF-6 and implemented by UNEP and MEE (2016-2022). This project offers scope for learning on the development of the National Park (NP) System and on techniques to improve the effectiveness of PA management of globally significant biodiversity.<sup>13</sup>
- *'Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity'*, funded by GEF-6 and implemented by UNDP. The project's objective is to put in place a long-term framework for marine conservation. Moreover, it has similar components to Project 045 that focus on addressing the enabling environment, improving management effectiveness of MPAs and carrying out coastal monitoring and information-sharing, which includes the Chinese White Dolphin. In this case, the MTR team was informed Project 045 has recently started talks on agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding with this project.
- *The North-East Asia Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation*, which has a permanent secretariat established in the Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP-ENEAC). This inter-governmental cooperation framework addresses environmental initiatives such as the development of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network, which is of interest to the YRE, because it supports, for example, the development of management plans, monitoring and assessment of MPAs.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The project has three components, a) National Park System Establishment, b) Provincial level National Park System strengthening at three NP pilot sites (Three-River Source NP, the Giant Panda NP, and the Xianju NP) and, c) Programme coordination and knowledge management. Five "child" projects supporting the development of the PA system are: 1) Enhancing conservation of globally significant biodiversity through PA system strengthening in Gansu, 2) Strengthening the PA system in the Qilian Mountains-Qinghai Lake landscape, 3) Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in SE China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity, 4) Expanding the coverage and strengthening the management of wetland protected areas in Sichuan Province, and 5) Building Sustainability into PA reforms to Conserve Globally Significant Biodiversity in China.

<sup>14</sup> NEASPEC: North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network Management Plans, Monitoring and Assessment of Marine Protected Areas, 2021.

## 4.2 Effectiveness

### **MTR question 2 – To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?**

**Finding 3:** The Project has made good progress in delivering an estimated 48 per cent of its planned outputs since the inception workshop in 2020 and initial data indicate that the Project is starting to deliver some positive outcomes. The most significant is the growing awareness and recognition among main stakeholders that MPA networks are a feasible way to bring them together to deliver positive change.

**Finding 4:** The Project has exceeded several targets in the Prodoc under components 1-4, even before its mid-term point (December 2022), when considering operations began in June 2020. Particularly impressive are wetland and mangrove restoration levels are 260% and 109% above targets respectively, at least five MPAs have surpassed their management capacity targets according to the latest METT assessments conducted in 2021, and the number of school children and volunteer groups targeted for environmental education outreach activities has been far higher than planned.

**Finding 5:** Despite the positive progress and achievements registered, Project 045 is in need of more time to achieve its objective. Moreover, some of the Projects outputs require updating to meet current needs and priorities of its main stakeholders. In addition, the MTR identified some important outputs are missing, such as a long-term capacity development plan for MPA management teams and coordinated law enforcement planning, that should be addressed to support Project 045 achieve its objective.

### *4.2.1 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under Component 1 - Policy, planning and institutional arrangements*

57. The Project has made satisfactory progress in delivering its planned outputs under Component 1 so far (to 30/09/2022). An estimated **60 per cent** of planned activities have been realised, or are underway so far. The following paragraphs provide a summary of the MTR team's main findings from its document analysis, which has been triangulated as far as possible through remote interviews, field visits and an assessment of alternative sources of information. Following this, the MTR team provides an assessment on what have been the initial outcomes (immediate effects) arising from the outputs and what factors may need to be addressed to achieve the wider outcome defined in the ToC in Chapter 3 above and presented in Appendix 9.
58. **Output 1.1** *Two local government regulations providing for ecological compensation for biodiversity conservation and wetlands restoration:* The project has made satisfactory progress on identifying a new policy and regulatory framework to mainstream ecological compensation payments (eco-compensation), also known as payments for ecosystem services (PES), to support all Protected Areas (including MPAs) located in Shandong and

Guangdong Provinces. A total of 10 policy documents are reported to have been drafted so far. These documents are expected to lead to the following initial outcomes, among others: (i) replacement of the interim measures for eco-compensation currently in place in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces with a new more integrated policy, regulatory and planning framework for eco-compensation initiatives; (ii) an increase in public investment to support the expansion of eco-compensation initiatives in key areas where it has already delivered positive results (see also Table 3 below). For example, the conversion of farmland and fishponds back into wetlands (in YRE) and mangroves and seagrass beds (in PRE) has been particularly successful in safeguarding the habitats for 371 and 257 bird species found in the YRE and PRE respectively (around 3% of all bird species globally); (iii) encouraging sustainable economic practices, such as ecotourism services, to restore habitats affected by, for example, abandoned oil wells located in the YRE, or fishing activities in areas where the Chinese White Dolphin feeds and breeds in the PRE.

59. **Output 1.2** *Strategic environmental impact assessment (SEIA) formulated and applied to economic development sector plans and programs in Dongying City (Yellow River) and Zhuhai City (Pearl River).* The Project has made satisfactory progress, with an estimated 50 per cent of activities completed so far. Most significant is the completion of a report on the current environmental policy framework in Shandong Province, which provides recommendations on how SEIA should be applied in economic development sector planning in Dongying City. A similar report for Zhuhai City is currently being prepared and is expected to be finalised and submitted by the end of 2022.
60. **Output 1.3** *One national policy reform incorporating MPA networking in existing SOA regulations and two draft local MPA regulations supporting the creation of MPA networks.* The dissolution of SOA in 2018 means the achievement of the first part of this output is no longer valid. However, progress on the formulation of draft regulations to guide the creation of MPA networks in the PRE and YRE appears to be highly satisfactory with an estimated **75 per cent** of planned tasks completed so far. A key finding is the high level of consensus among interviewees that Project 045 has been instrumental in bringing key stakeholders together to agree on the establishment of the following MPA networks: (i) five MPAs in the PRE (see Figure 1), which excludes the Hengqin Island PA proposed in the Prodoc; (ii) six MPAs in the YRE (see Figure 2), which correspond to the same number of MPA and Special MPAs (SMPA) proposed in Prodoc. The MTR team confirms the review of the draft regulations have been finalised and will be submitted for review and adoption in the early part of 2023.
61. **Output 1.4** *Two long-term MPA integrated management and networking Plans developed.* Progress under Output 1.3 has also facilitated highly satisfactory progress in completing around **75 per cent** of the main tasks under Output 1.4. The completion of the following activities have contributed to the drafting of these plans: (i) biodiversity conservation gap analyses completed in PRE and YRE; (ii) indicators from the Management Effectiveness

Tracking Tool (METT) incorporated into the MPA assessment scorecards applied by Guangdong and Shandong Provincial Governments; (iii) all 11 MPAs assessed using these new scorecards to produce the “assessment of assessments” (AoA) report, in which management gaps and needs were identified concerning the development of the MPA networks proposed in PRE and YRE (see also Output 3.1). Moreover, the MTR team found the process of preparing these plans has been coordinated with the formulation of long-term restoration strategies for PRE and YRE (Output 1.5).

62. **Output 1.5** *Two medium to long-term restoration strategies for estuarine ecosystems developed.* The project has made highly satisfactory progress in completing around **75 per cent** of the main activities planned under this output. In addition to the activities mentioned under Output 1.4, the following actions have aided the drafting of the long-term restoration strategy in YRE: (i) a landscape analysis and land use change assessment for the period 2017-2021. This enabled the Project to identify trends, such as the percentage of wetlands and forest landscapes that have been lost to human activity between 2017-2021 (1.3%), as well as review how far land use planning policies in Dongying City are integrating measures to protect biodiversity in the PRE, especially in and around the MPA network selected; (ii) an assessment of the level of information sharing taking place between MPAs in PRE and YRE. This facilitated the conclusion of an information sharing protocols in YRE and the PRE, (see also Output 2.4 below); (iii) a report on the role of nature reserves in supporting sustainable economic and social development in the YRE region; (iv) a report on the establishing sustainable ecotourism zones in the YRE as a pretext to expand ecological restoration (see also Output 1.1). The MTR team understands this report has also been used to develop new policies dedicated to establishing new facilities and services to encourage ecotourism, promote ecological education and stimulate community participation in restoration work, field observations, patrols and fire monitoring, among others.
63. **Output 1.6** *Two medium to long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans and protocols developed.* Progress is highly satisfactory with around **75 per cent** of activities completed. Interviews confirm long-term ecological health monitoring plans have been drafted, reviewed and in the YRE it has already been officially adopted by the Shandong Provincial Government in 2021. Meanwhile approval and implementation of the monitoring plan for the PRE is expected to be finalised and adopted before the end of 2022. In both cases, the main task of the Project is to oversee the plans are implemented and data is generated to support data sharing (in accordance with the data sharing protocol) and supports informed decision-making in the MPA networks. In the case of the YRE, this will have to be adapted to accommodate the monitoring requirements within the new YRE National Park and how it coordinates monitoring with the MPAs outside the National Park.
64. **Output 1.7** *Two existing estuarine institutional coordination mechanisms in Shandong (ICM) and Guangdong (MALG) operating effectively (based on regular data exchange to support decision-making (documented in minutes).* The progress and achievements

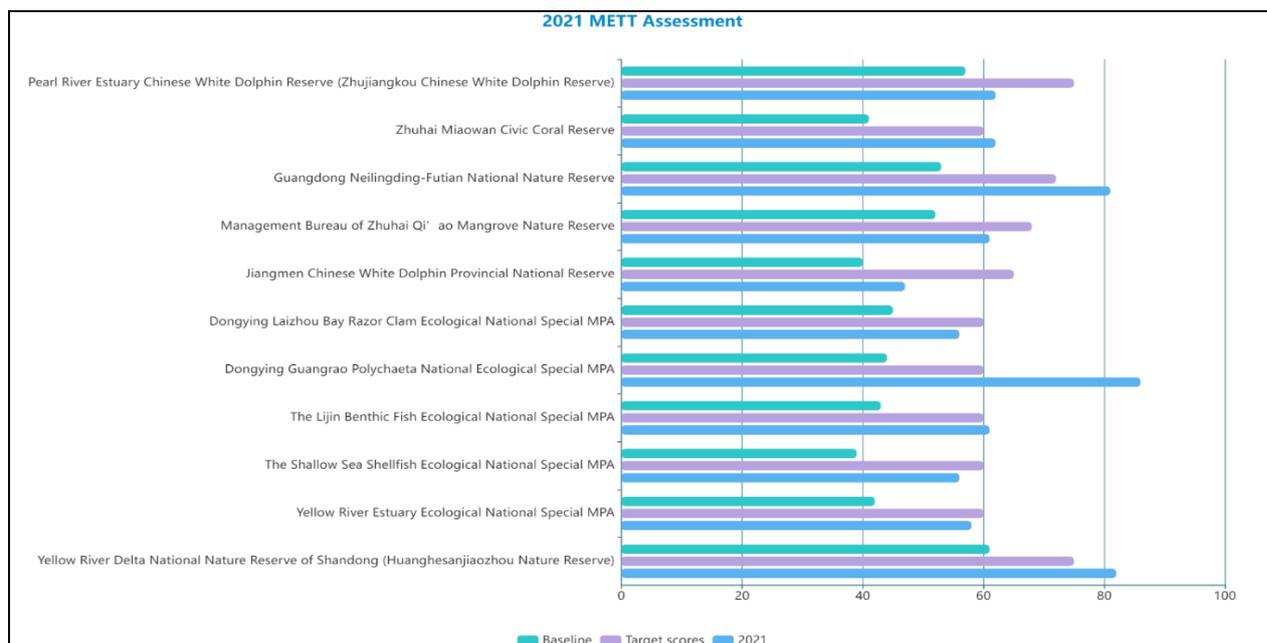
summarised under Outputs 1.1. to 1.6 provide significant evidence to suggest Project 045 has made satisfactory progress in encouraging both Guangdong and Shandong Provincial Governments, and the Municipal Governments of Zhuhai and Dongying, to learn about the benefits of applying more coordinated approaches to the way: (i) MPA networks should be governed and co-managed in the PRE and YRE with the support of local community volunteer groups and the private sector adopting sustainable economic activities; (ii) economic and social sectors should integrate ecological protection and monitoring into their policies and plans to enhance their own sustainability over the long-term; (iii) economic diversification can be encouraged to support and sustain MPA networks; (iv) data sharing is key to supporting the development of informed policy dialogue and decision-making on how to build effective and sustainable MPA networks in the PRE and YRE.

65. **Progress in delivering immediate outcome 1** (as defined in Chapter 3): *a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework to restore, conserve and sustainably use estuarine ecosystems in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces is applied by main stakeholders, in line with GEF/FAO priorities and the objectives of ecological civilisation in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)*, is considered to be highly satisfactory. This is substantiated by the following main findings:

- The abovementioned achievements indicate that an integrated policy, strategic and planning framework has been identified and, subject to its final review and adoption, likely to facilitate a more coordinated ecosystem-based approach to managing the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE. This is further demonstrated by the METT assessment of all 11 MPAs conducted in 2021, which shows all MPAs have improved on their baseline scores from 2017 and in five cases the MPAs have already exceed the target scores by the end of the Project, (see Figure 3 below);
- The strengthening of the regulatory framework coupled with the promotion of co-management of the MPA networks demonstrates a more inclusive approach is in the process of development to encourage greater ownership of the restoration, ecological monitoring and law enforcement processes;
- The introduction of new policies and regulations on eco-compensation and a budget of CNY 4.85 b. (USD 664 m.) for restoration in the YRE alone from 2022 to 2025, has clarified among main stakeholders (government officials, universities, the general public and the private sector linked to the fishing, forestry and tourism sectors) that eco-compensation initiatives have become a central theme to improve the quality of the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE. Moreover, this fully complies with GEF/FAO priorities, the long-term goal of the NBSAP<sup>15</sup> and latest national policies and laws introduced since 2019 on protecting biodiversity and stepping up ecological civilisation.

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<sup>15</sup> The NSAP's long-term goal is, "By 2030, biodiversity in China has been effectively protected. The number and area of nature reserves of all levels will have reached the required level and ecosystems, species and genetic diversity have been effectively protected. A complete policy and legal system on biodiversity conservation and a sound mechanism of sustainable use of biological resources has been established. The public will participate voluntarily in biodiversity conservation".

**Figure 3: METT Assessment of all 11 MPAs in the PRE and YRE (2021)**

Source: PMO

- The development of long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans for both PRE and YRE, supported by data sharing protocols (Output 1.6), enables the Provincial and Municipal Governments concerned to study how far positive trends in the ecological health of the MPA network are attributed to effective management. This is important, because the GEF Tracking Tool and the METT indicators that have been integrated into the management assessment scorecards for the 11 MPAs (Output 1.4) are primarily designed to assess management effectiveness, whereas ecological health monitoring will assess conservation outcomes.
- The integration of key elements from the restoration strategies, management plans and SEIA reports into the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Planning process for 2021-2025, in particular the Five-Year Plans of the Provincial Governments of Shandong and Guangdong and the municipal governments of Dongying and Zhuhai municipalities. At the national level, interviewees stated NFGA's Five-Year Plan (covering its national and provincial offices) has also applied key elements from the policy, strategic and planning framework promoted in the PRE and YRE. In addition, the 14<sup>th</sup> National Five-Year Plan includes provisions to create a National Park (NP) in the YRE. The MTR team understands the new NP has the full backing of President Xi and the State Council. Its demarcation is still confidential, but reference to the article in The People's Daily Online, states the NP will cover around "3,523 square kilometers, including 1,371 square kilometers of land area and 2,152 square kilometers of sea area".<sup>16</sup> This area will not only cover the network of MPAs

<sup>16</sup> People's Daily Online, China's Yellow River Delta sees ecological improvement, 16/06/2022.

supported by Project 045, but all eight MPAs in the YRE, plus a new wetland site around the old Yellow River Delta to the North of Dongying City.

66. In spite of these highly positive developments, the MTR identified some shortcomings that are likely to affect how far Project 045 achieves its **wider outcome 1** identified in the ToC (Chapter 3): *up-scaling and out-scaling of co-management approaches to restore, conserve and sustainably use of estuarine ecosystems in PRC is included in the 15th Five-Year Plan, based on lessons learned and good practices from Project 045 and in line with commitments to achieve national targets linked to the Sustainable Development Goals - Agenda 2030*. The first concerns the problem of overlapping mandates, which the MTR team found has been flagged by some stakeholders interviewed when they conducted the threat analyses (see also Output 3.1). This has been triangulated further by reviewing the GEF-4 Tracking Tool that was completed for all 11 MPAs on 31/03/2021. For example, in Section 6 of the Assessment Form for the MPAs, the Zhuhai Qi'ao Mangrove Nature Reserve in PRE states, *"some area of the PA is still destroyed by road and bridge projects"*. In a second example, analysis of Part V of the Tracking Tool under Objective 2 (Mainstreaming biodiversity in Production Landscapes/Seascapes and Sectors), confirms that the policy, legal and regulatory framework for Maritime Transport makes no reference to biodiversity considerations, while other sectors such as Agriculture and Tourism have only a limited framework in place. Indeed, the vast majority of interviewees confirm the coordinating mechanisms for the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE are in need of strengthening further by encouraging greater cross-sector representation to address the conflicting jurisdictions and institutional roles that are currently operating in the PRE and YRE. Moreover, this represents an important prerequisite to establishing an effective national system of MPAs in China over the long-term.
67. Second, Project 045 is supporting complex activities, such as ecological health monitoring in the PRE and YRE without recourse to lessons learned and good practices identified in other relevant GEF-funded projects. For example, the GEF-5 Project 057 is supporting the development and the national roll-out of River/Lake Health Assessments (R/LHA), but there has been no exchanges of staff to discuss areas of common interest such as good practices in data collection, validation, processing and modelling. In another example, the GEF-5 Project 052 is supporting the application of ecological health monitoring in the Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area (PLWEPA) which is overseen by the Poyang Lake Wetland Management Coordination Committee.
68. Third, the opportunity of integrating risk management into the policy framework for MPAs has not been adequately explored by Project 045. As a result, raising awareness and capacity on the important role ecological protection, restoration and monitoring, threat analyses, etc. can play in reducing the vulnerability of local communities and natural habitats to acute weather events and increasing their resilience to the effects of climate change, is not very evident. Furthermore, the METT applied by GEF only requires an assessment of the long-term threats of climate change (under Section 11 of the Data

Sheet on Protected Area Threats). This means the potential to justify investment in biodiversity conservation to support disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change has not been adequately addressed. This is despite ample evidence in PRC and globally that the economic, social and environmental costs of rehabilitation after a major weather or climatic event is far higher than disaster prevention. In addition, the METT assessment is mainly intended for terrestrial PAs given it asks for scoring only on habitat alteration, droughts, extreme temperatures and flooding. As such, the impact of climate change in SMPAs covering seascapes cannot not be adequately assessed.

#### *4.2.2. Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under Component 2 – MPA networking and wetland restoration*

69. The project is making satisfactory progress in delivering the planned outputs under Component 2. An estimated **40 per cent** of planned activities have been realised, or underway to 30/09/2022. A summary of the main findings of the MTR team's assessment of progress and achievements under Outputs 2.1 to 2.6 are reviewed in the following paragraphs, followed by an assessment of the initial and wider outcomes expected from these outputs, which have been determined in the ToC (see Chapter 3).
70. **Output 2.1** *Biodiversity conservation gap analysis and ecological connectivity strategy completed.* The Project has completed its report on the conservation gaps in the YRE, but not in the PRE. Overall physical progress under this output is, therefore around **50 per cent** completed. Among the main achievements of the gap analysis has been the identification of ecological connectivity and co-management gaps currently experienced within the proposed network of 6 MPAs in the YRE. Moreover, the gap analysis in the YRE has served to raise awareness among stakeholders on the impact different sectors have on the MPAs and on the need for inter-sectoral dialogue to reduce these impacts through effective restoration, conservation and sustainable use measures. The proposal to create a NP in the YRE is also seen by the MTR team as an important response to addressing some key recommendations emanating from the gap analysis in the YRE. In particular it addresses the need to enlarge some of the SMPAs that are considered to be too small to support the long-term ecological sustainability of the MPA network.
71. **Output 2.2** *Management effectiveness of eleven MPAs strengthened through provision of support for updating of management plans, equipment for monitoring and surveillance, and staff training and introduction of principles of co-management and sustainable financial arrangements.* The Project is around **50 per cent** of the way to achieving this output. Interviewees confirmed training on the application of Geographical Information System (GIS) software has made a significant contribution to building capacity on MPA management. The MTR team highlights three important developments:
- MPA staff are learning how the combination of remote sensing imagery and GIS can develop a user-friendly spatial data platform that can support informed

decision-making on biodiversity and habitat restoration and conservation, on law enforcement and infrastructure needs, among others.

- MPA staff are all applying national classification standards for all GIS mapping exercises to support MPA connectivity and the development of co-management with civil society. For example, the MPAs have all adopted the same GIS standards to demarcate their MPAs and the biological corridors needed to develop the MPA network.
- MPA staff are now accessing and using physical data from different government agencies such as, FIO, NFGA, MEE and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA), which includes the Bureau of Fisheries, which is supporting the development of a collaborative monitoring and evaluation system in the MPA networks (see also Output 2.4 below).

72. **Output 2.3** *Creation of at least one new provincial level MPA.* This output is no longer relevant. However, the decision to create a new YRE National Park, constitutes the creation of a much larger MPA that will combine coastal landscapes and seascapes for the first time in China. Additionally, the new National Park will expand marine conservation over an area that is around 10 per cent larger than the current land and sea area covered by the MPA network supported by Project 045 (see Table 2)

73. **Output 2.4** *Establishment of MPA coordinating networking mechanisms in two estuaries.* Project 045 successfully completed an assessment on the level of information sharing taking place between MPAs in the PRE and YRE (see Output 1.5 above) in 2020 before information sharing agreements and protocols were agreed between the six MPAs in the YRE (2020) and five MPAs in the PRE (2021). Interviews indicate that the MPA networks are sharing information and data, but more training and support is required to support more coordinated and informed decision-making in key areas such as ecological restoration, connectivity, monitoring and law enforcement, among others.

74. Nevertheless, the information sharing agreements and protocols have facilitated the development of the new information sharing platform hosted by the NFGA at [www.estuary.com.cn](http://www.estuary.com.cn). The platform will enable government staff at all levels to access the platform using a dedicated username and password to guide decision-making on MPA planning, monitoring, etc at both the individual MPA and MPA network levels.

75. The PMO provided a demonstration of this platform to the MTR team. Two important findings from this demonstration are: (i) the PRE and YRE have been mapped at a large scale (1:5,000) in order to provide MPA staff with high resolution maps to depict the location and shape of geographic features, and monitor human/natural activity in the different coastal landscapes and seascapes covered by the two MPA networks; (ii) the development of an unified inventory on flora and fauna species (including plankton, phytoplankton and zooplankton), means they can now be mapped according to their specific environmental variables, (such as where they feed and breed, or the depth and distance they are normally found from the shoreline). This will enhance the quality of

biodiversity/habitat restoration and conservation plans over time, and enable the MPA networks to act more decisively if a decline of key species is detected. Indeed, interviews with stakeholders in the YRE stated Project 045 has already contributed to a greater understanding on the freshwater needs of estuarine species, which resulted in a formal request to the Ministry of Water Resources (MWR) to release more freshwater from its upstream dams into the YRE in 2022;

76. **Output 2.5** *2,000 ha of wetlands restored of which at least 1,000 ha of grass wetlands (Yellow River)*. According to data provided to the MTR team by the interviewees responsible for the abovementioned study on landscape analysis and land use change in the YRE, Project 045 has already far exceeded the targets for this output. However, this is primarily due to support from publicly funded restoration initiatives that have been operating in the YRDNNP since the official entry of duty of Project 045 in 2017. The study states that a total of 7,791 ha of wetlands were restored at a total cost of CNY 651 m. between 2017 and 2021, of which 3,000 ha of grass wetlands were restored using local varieties of *Suaeda salsa* (seepweed).<sup>17</sup> Triangulation through site visits, a review of images and a review of other sources of information confirm this highly satisfactory achievement. For example, an article in the China Daily on 16/06/2022 also reported similar restoration data; namely 7,966 ha of wetlands restored in the YRDNNP over the same period, of which 3,133 ha of *Suaeda salsa* (seepweed) and seagrass beds were recovered from farmland, or invasive species such as *Sporobolus alterniflorus* (smooth cordgrass).<sup>18</sup>
77. **Output 2.6** *110 ha of mangroves restored (Pearl River) including the removal of abandoned mariculture facilities in Hengqin Marine Park*. The decision to remove Hengqin Marine Park from the list of PAs proposed in the Prodoc on the grounds this PA received substantial public funding for restoration work prior to the start of operations in 2020, means this output is out of date. Instead, the MTR team found Project 045 is concentrating on supporting the restoration of mangroves in the Qi'ao-Dangan Islands Provincial Nature Reserve (QDIPNR) and former fish ponds in the NFNNR (Futian Mangrove Nature Reserve), located in Shenzhen Bay. This reserve has a total area of 367.6 ha, but mangroves only account for 98.2 ha.
78. The Project has also supported the restoration of 14.8 ha of fish ponds back to mangroves and wetland feeding grounds for over 250 bird species that live, or visit the site. An important finding on this restoration work is that it has received scientific guidance from the Hong Kong Maipo Wetland Park on restoring the fish ponds with different depths and ensuring the 11 native species of mangroves are used in the reforestation work. This is significant, because project stakeholders are now more aware of: (i) tailoring fish pond restoration to different depths to satisfy the feeding habits of different birds that feed at

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<sup>17</sup> In addition, it reports ongoing restoration work is projected to restore a further 6,463 ha by 2025 with a total investment of CNY 576 m.

<sup>18</sup> People's Daily Online, China's Yellow River Delta sees ecological improvement, 16/06/2022.

the site; (ii) using all the local species of mangroves is crucial to restoring the food web for the birds that feed at the site. In the other part of the NFNNR, the Neilingding Island Protected Area (554 ha), the residents of Lingding Island agreed to a relocation package in order to support the protection of mangrove forests that are the habitat for over 1,200 macaque monkeys and globally important species such as the pangolin.

79. In the QDIPNR, the MTR team's field visit also identified unreported mangrove restoration has taken place covering 105.21 ha of mangroves and coastal tidal flats in the Qi'ao Mangrove Nature Reserve (QMNR). Also significant is the restoration of riparian strips in main waterways using sea mulberry. In this particular case, the MTR team were informed the restoration of mangroves in QMNR is part of its wider Vision Plan to become the country's first blue carbon town. The goal is to demonstrate both nationally and internationally the win-win benefits of creating a low-carbon community that is in harmony with nature.
80. **Progress in delivering immediate outcome 2** as defined in Chapter 3: *Co-management of MPA networks in the YRE and PRE under a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework leads to the stabilisation and/or increase in their ecological goods and services over time (includes counts of fish eggs, fish larvae, migratory birds, carbon storage, flood prevention, etc.)*, is considered to be satisfactory. Although Project 045 has been operational only since June 2020, the MTR team has collected sufficient evidence to indicate it is making an important contribution to government initiatives, projects and programmes that are dedicated to slowing down and reversing the loss of habitats in the two MPA networks. This is a significant achievement when considering the protection, restoration and conservation of wetland habitats and seascapes is an important prerequisite to both increasing important ecological services such as carbon fixation, improving water quality, regulating salinity, storing flood waters, etc. and halting and/or reversing the loss of coastal and marine biodiversity. Moreover, thanks to GIS, MPA staff are now able to observe more effectively not only habitat restoration, but the area of the MPA under improved management over time. ed, reference to Table 2 shows the area of wetlands and seascapes under improved management has increased in the PRE from 65,209 to 67,688 ha (3.7%) between 2017 and 2022, and in the YRE from 322,111 to 325,130 ha (1.0%). However, the formal launch of the new National Park in the YRE in 2023 is expected to increase the official land area under improved management to 359,155 ha (9.5%), according to the latest data available from the PMO.
81. Turning to ecological monitoring, the most reliable data emerging from the two estuaries appears to be on: (i) birds, especially the endangered Oriental white stork in the PRE, which indicates breeding pairs are up from three breeding pairs in 2011 (reported in the Prodoc) to 120 breeding pairs in 2021; (ii) monitoring of Chinese White Dolphins in the PRE, indicates numbers have increased at both the ZCWDR and JCWDR by 10 and 20 per cent respectively between 2017 and 2022, based on dorsal fin identification monitoring. The MTR team also confirmed sightings during the field mission (see Figures 4 and 5); (iii) the monitoring of salinity in the YRE since 1980, which indicates rises in salinity in the estuary

(due to insufficient flushing of freshwater from dams upstream), affects the spawning of important fish (such as the small yellow croaker, mackerel, shrimp) is affected. In other areas of ecological monitoring, the MTR team identified some gaps that are likely to have a bearing on the achievement of the **wider outcome 2** identified in the ToC - *local communities and the private sector who support the conservation and sustainable use of the ecological goods and services of the PRE and YRE PRE register an increase in their livelihoods and a reduction in their vulnerability to disasters and the effects of climate change.*

**Table 2: Increase in MPA area under improved management in PRE and YRE (2017-2022)**

MPA name	Category/date established	MPA area under management in 2017 (ha)	MPA area under impr. management at 30/09/2022 (ha)	Target PA under impr. management to 04/02/2023 (ha)
<b>Pearl River Estuary - MPA Network</b>				
Zhujiangkou CWDR	National/2003	46,000	46,000	46,000
Jiangmen CWDR	National/2003	10,748	10,958	922
NFNNR	National/1988	922	922	7,373
QDINNR	National/2004	5,104	7,373	10,958
Miaowan Civic Coral Res.	IUCN/2006	2,435	2,435	2,435
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>65,209</b>	<b>67,688</b>	<b>67,688</b>
<b>Yellow River Estuary - MPA network</b>				
YRDNNR*	National/1992	153,000	153,000	351,799
DEE-NSMPA	National/2008	92,600	92,600	
LBRC-NSMPA	National/2009	21,024	17,958	
SSS-NSMPA	National/2009	39,623	44,812	
LBF-NSMPA	National/2008	9,404	9,404	
GP-NSMPA	National/2009	6,460	7,356	7,356
<b>Total</b>	-	<b>322,111</b>	<b>325,130</b>	<b>359,155</b>
<b>TOTAL AREA</b>	-	<b>387,320</b>	<b>392,818</b>	<b>426,843</b>

Source: PMO/GEF Tracking Tool. \*The target area of 351,799 ha. for YRDNNR refers to the total area of the new National Park planned for the YRE, which will incorporate DEE-NSMPA, LBRC-NSMPA, SSS-NSMPA and LBF-NSMPA.

82. On the one hand, MTR team found there is insufficient monitoring of ecological services such as the estimated carbon stored through restoration of wetlands, sea grass meadows and mangrove forests, or how far the restoration work is contributing to improved water quality. Similarly, the monitoring of spawn and juvenile density of fish and other aquatic animals, appears to be limited by the small number of monitoring stations and qualified staff involved. As a result, there is a risk reporting may be providing unreliable data. For example, interviewees confirmed the density of fish eggs has been rising in the period 2017-2021, but juvenile density has not. On the other, there is insufficient monitoring of the activities of other sectors identified as threats from the threat analysis and METT assessment, especially linked to pollution and effluent from agriculture, housing, industry and transport. This situation is not aided by the lack of representation of these sectors in

the information sharing agreements and coordination mechanisms established in the PRE and YRE to support the application of risk mapping.

#### Figures 4 & 5: Chinese White Dolphin spotted in PRE and dorsal fin monitoring



Source: MTR national consultant and PMO

#### 4.2.3 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 3 – Threat analysis and mitigation

83. The Project has achieved highly satisfactory progress so far in delivering the outputs under Component 3. An estimated **50 per cent** of planned activities have been realised, or in the process of completion to 30/09/2022. A summary of the main findings on the progress and achievements under each output and on their outcomes as per the ToC, are provided in the following paragraphs.
84. **Output 3.1:** *Comprehensive analysis of threats to the ecological “health” of the two ecosystems and investment strategies developed and implemented through municipal level 13th 5 years plans.* The project is around **50 per cent** of the way to completing the four main activities under this output. This is mainly attributed to the completion of the AoA for the YRE, as previously mentioned under Output 1.4, and finalisation of the draft investment strategy for the MPA network in the YRE. However, neither of these activities have been completed in the PRE, but are expected to be completed and reported to the next PSC meeting at the end of November 2022. Main finding from the AoA is that the main threats to the MPA network in the PRE are mainly anthropogenic hazards caused by poorly managed human activity in the Pearl River basin. Main hazards include: (i) solid waste washed into the river system; (ii) domestic and industrial waste water, (iii) agricultural non-point source pollution and aquaculture tail water discharged into the river system and estuary, (iv) invasive species and (v) shipping. Correspondingly, main anthropogenic hazards in the YRE include: (i) agricultural non-point source pollution and aquaculture tail water discharged into the river system and estuary; (ii) over-fishing in offshore, (iii) invasive species, (iv) domestic and industrial waste water, (v) solid waste washed into the river system, (vi) climate change and extreme weather.
85. An important gap identified concerns a specific assessment on the potential threats associated with climate variability and change in the YRE, in particular linked to the rise in

sea surface temperature. The investment strategy focuses on the promotion of “high quality economic development” that supports structural changes towards “green transformation”. It proposes as the main driver of green transformation the development of ecotourism services together with scientific education and research facilities. Together these are seen as supportive of developing ecological civilisation, which is seen as a pathway to “spiritual civilisation”.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the strategy promotes the development of a sustainable fisheries sector. Economic activities linked to the development of carbon sinks, pollution control and flood protection did not appear to have been reviewed and considered in the strategy.

86. **Output 3.2** *Sustainable production and service activities generating local income and reducing stress on critical estuarine habitats developed and implemented based on: (a) eco-farming of mitten crab (Yellow River Estuary); and (b) ecotourism, ecological compensation, PA employment in Hengqin Marine Park (Pearl River Estuary).* Preliminary studies and assessments on sustainable job creation in both the MPA networks have been completed to a satisfactory manner, although no jobs have been created so far. In the YRE, research into the development of eco-farming of mitten crab, (also known as hairy crab) is ongoing and being conducted by the Dongying Kanghua Marine Technology Company. A field visit to the site by the national consultant confirms eco-production of mitten crab has reached close to 500 metric tonnes (MT) and is estimated to generate around CNY 50 million (USD 7.03 m.) by end of 2022. Market conditions appear to be good, because this variety of crab is considered to be a high-end seafood product.
87. In the PRE, Project 045 conducted a Political, Economic, Social and Technological analysis (PEST) on ecotourism development throughout the MPA network. This decision was agreed by the PSC following the decision to not include the Hengqin Marine Park in the MPA network in the PRE. The study focused mainly on the needs of the domestic ecotourism market and, similar to the study in the YRE (Output 3.1), concluded that ecotourism, education and research should be prioritised on the grounds these sectors could generate a lot of “ecological” employment linked to the development of educational and research facilities, the production of teaching materials and establishment of ecotourism services. A key finding from the study is the proposal for the MPA network to have a unified ecotourism development plan and regulations to encourage and support the integration of the MPA network, while at the same time provide visitors with a wider choice of educational experiences in of the PRE.
88. In addition to this study in the PRE, a study has been completed on identifying at least 10 sustainable jobs to support the long-term development of eco-tourism in the PRE network, using the QDIPNR as a case study. The MTR team’s main finding from this research is that rather than training local residents in a generic fashion to become guides, it recommended training should focus on offering visitors the opportunity to select guides

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<sup>19</sup> One of the main goals of the Chinese Communist Party is to build a socialist harmonious society through education and “spiritual civilisation”.

who can provide an “ecological and cultural experience”. Themes proposed include, “the wonder of plant life - mangroves”, “the mystery of animal life – the white dolphin”, and “protecting nature - cherishing life”. The MTR team found this approach promotes a win-win situation. First, it encourages ecotourists to take positive action on nature conservation and, second, it empowers the local residents trained to actively support the long-term co-management and conservation of the MPA network in the PRE.

89. **Output 3.3** *Village conservation groups operating and local communities participating in MPA activities.* Project 045 has made highly satisfactory progress in engaging a total of 590 local residents in the development of volunteer conservation groups so far. This already exceeds the target of 500 volunteers in the Prodoc. In the PRE a total of five volunteer conservation groups have received support. This is reported to be first time such groups have been created and encouraged to engage in co-management of the five SMPAs since their creation between 2008 and 2009. The five groups, each of which have 10 committee members from local fishing communities in Dongying municipality are as follows: (i) the Ecological Protection Volunteer Group (EPVG) of the Laizhou Bay Razor Clam National Special Marine Protected Area (LBRC-NSPMA), (ii) the EPVG of the Dongying Estuarine Ecology NSMPA (DEE-NSPMA), (iii) the EPVG of the Guangrao Polychaete National SMPA (GP-NSMPA), 100 members, (iv) the EPVG of the Shallow Sea Shellfish National SMPA (SSS-NSMPA) 100 members and, (v) the EPVG of the Lijin Benthic Fish National SMPA (LBF-NSMPA). In the PRE one EPVG has been established so far in the Qi’ao Island and consists of 31 households.
90. Interviews and field visits confirm the EPVGs are popular because they facilitate the mobilisation of their local fishing communities (includes school children, teachers, parents, etc.) to participate in activities raise awareness on the importance of conserving the natural resources to sustain their livelihoods and encourages fishermen and their families to consider taking up alternative employment opportunities linked to ecotourism, scientific research and law enforcement.
91. **Output 3.4** *Multi-agency, integrated monitoring plan developed and implemented.* This activity is planned to start in 2023, after the plans under Component 1 have been approved.
92. **Progress in delivering immediate outcome 3** (as defined in Chapter 3) - *YRE & PRE register a net rise in public participation and economic investment dedicated to restoring, conserving and promoting the sustainable use of their ecological goods and services, aided by eco-monitoring data to support informed decision-making on where to target resources in the MPA networks.* Data collected by the MTR team on public investment supporting restoration and eco-compensation in the PRE and YRE in the period 2013-2017 compared to 2018-2022 appears to be highly satisfactory. Table 3 shows total public investment (where available) has increased significantly from USD 33.74 m. in 2013-2017 to USD 72.29 m. in 2018-2022 in the PRE. Meanwhile in the YRE it has risen from USD 20.42 m. to USD 190.47 m. over the same periods. This indicates a significant stepping up of public

investment to halt marine biodiversity and habitat loss in both estuaries. In the case of the latter, this has been aided by strong political support to create a new National Park that will include five of the MPAs in the current MPA network supported by Project 045 in the YRE. This development also has contributed to the achievements reported under Component 1 above.

**Table 3: Public investment in eco-compensation and restoration in PRE & YRE (2013-22)**

Name of MPA	2013-2017 (USD)	2018-2022 (USD)
<b>Pearl River Estuary - MPA Network</b>		
Zhujiangkou Chinese White Dolphin Reserve	7,100,000	11,930,000
Jiangmen Chinese White Dolphin Reserve	n/a	n/a
Neilingding-Futian Nature Reserve	25,223,626	43,565,242
Qi'ao Mangrove Nature Reserve	1,419,849	2,839,699
Miaowan Civic Coral Reserve	n/a	13,957,319
<b>Total PRE</b>	<b>33,743,475</b>	<b>72,292,260</b>
<b>Yellow River Estuary - MPA network</b>		
Yellow River Delta Nature Reserve	4,216,953	190,473,521
Yellow river Ecological Special MPA	3,200,000	n/a
Laizhou Bay Razor Clam Special MPA	9,500,000	n/a
Lijin Benthic Fish Special MPA	2,595,343	n/a
Shallow Sea Shellfish Special MPA	n/a	n/a
Guangrao Polchaete Special MPA	907,850	n/a
<b>Total YRE</b>	<b>20,420,146</b>	<b>190,473,521</b>
<b>TOTAL PRE &amp; YRE</b>	<b>54,163,621</b>	<b>262,765,781</b>

Source: PMO; n/a: not available

93. In the event public investment continues increase to support the ecological restoration of the MPA networks to at least 2025, the in achievement of the wider outcome for component 3, as defined in Chapter 3 - *YRE & PRE register a net rise in private investment dedicated to the sustainable use of ecological goods and services, social development of local communities and good governance within the MPA network* – is likely. However, one caveat was evident in the investment strategies. On the one hand, they have a strong focus on identifying niche markets where local inhabitants can provide unique services to ecotourists that support environmental, social and governance (ESG) themes in the MPA network. On the other, there is a lack of focus on the role private investors could be encouraged to play in advancing ESG in the two MPA networks. This is important, because there is a growing global recognition among governments and the private sector that investment should increasingly demonstrate its role in addressing the ecological and climate emergencies, developing human capital and improving governance. Moreover, the MTR team considers the ESG concept fits with the CCP's objective of building a socialist harmonious society.

#### 4.2.4 *Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 4 – Capacity building and increasing environmental awareness*

94. The project is making highly satisfactory progress in delivering the planned outputs under Component 4, with the educational infrastructure established and materials produced so far found to be of a very high quality. An estimated **40 per cent** of planned activities have already been realised, or are ongoing to 30/09/2022. A summary of the main findings of the MTR team's assessment of progress and achievements under Outputs 4.1 to 4.6 are reviewed in the following paragraphs, followed by an assessment of the initial and wider outcomes expected from these outputs, as prescribed in the ToC in Chapter 3.
95. **Output 4.1** *International and in-country training for senior officials and technical staff in ecosystem-based principles applied to the management and conservation of estuaries.* The COVID-19 pandemic has prevented international training to take place to 30/09/2022. However, only two courses (**20 per cent**) of the in-country training planned (10 courses) has been realised covering biodiversity conservation and information sharing. The PMO reports a total of 70 senior officials and technical staff have participated in these two courses (see Table 6 in section 4.6). This figure also complies with the recommended participation rate of 20-30 persons mentioned in the Prodoc. Interviews with stakeholders who participated in these two courses stated the quality of the presentations, the information provided, case studies used, etc. has been satisfactory. At this stage it is not possible to determine how many MPAs are applying informed decision-making using the ecological monitoring data developed so far. However, interviews confirm some stakeholders are using data to support their decision-making. This appears to be particularly the case concerning salinity monitoring, which, the MTR team understands, has been used to agree freshwater flushing needs into the YRE with the Provincial Office of the MNR. These needs have also been integrated into the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of the Provincial Government for Shandong Province.
96. **Output 4.2** *Training courses for community volunteers.* The training of the six volunteer groups mentioned under Output 3.3 has largely been completed in 2022. The training courses have focused on ecological education to emphasise the importance of MPAs to fishing communities, supporting their internal management, providing equipment such as life jackets, life buoys and guiding how volunteer work on beach clean-up campaigns should be conducted (see Figure 6). This guidance included training on recycling/safe disposal of rubbish and on restoring fish stocks in the YRE (see Figure 7). In 2023, training will aim to encourage the volunteer groups to participate in ecological monitoring exercises (such as bird counts) and supporting law enforcement.
97. **Output 4.3** *Cross-site visits.* These activities have been restricted by the COVID-19. Nevertheless, 12 people have participated so far in cross-site visits to the Pearl River Estuary (8 from YRE) and to the YRE (4 from the PRE), which is equivalent to **30 per cent** of the 44 persons targeted in the Prodoc. In addition, one person from the GEF-5 Project

048 in Jilin Province accompanied the site visit to YRE.<sup>20</sup> In addition, 16 individuals from the PMO are reported to have conducted an exchange visit to the GEF-5 048 project in Jilin Province and a further 16 individuals from Project 045 took part in the Jiangxi International Birdwatching Festival in December 2021, which was supported by the GEF-5 052 project supporting wetland conservation the Poyang Lake. The visits have helped forge new networking and information exchange opportunities on wetland restoration, although this operates on an *ad hoc* basis rather than through a formal information exchange protocol that is supported and guided by FAO-CN.

### Figures 6 and 7: Volunteer conservation groups created in the PRE and YRE (2022)



Source: PMO.

98. **Output 4.4** *MPA managers and technical staff have attended international training session under south-south cooperation in: 1) co-management mechanisms for increased sustainability of estuarine MPAs; 2) ecosystem approach to estuarine biodiversity conservation involving sectors operating in the areas of influence of the MPAs; and 3) systematic monitoring of ecosystem health as an important component in biodiversity.* No international training sessions have taken place so far due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the fact the MPA network in the YRE is likely to form an important part of the new National Park currently being finalised for adoption, there is a case to also consider an international training visit to a National Park that combines the management of terrestrial and marine protected areas. Figures 8 and 9 show examples of new reference books produced for schools in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities.
99. **Output 4.5** *Increased student awareness and knowledge of the significance of marine biodiversity conservation and the role of MPAs.* The Project has supported the production of a large quantity of quality school books on marine biodiversity for schools in both Zhuhai and Dongying Cities. The MTR team has clarified that these books are designed as reference books to support the current school curriculum on teaching marine science. Examples, of reference books produced to support learning on the conservation of marine biodiversity in the PRE and YRE are provided in figures 8 to 11.

<sup>20</sup> The GEF-5 Project 048 title is: Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Land Management in the Soda Saline-alkaline Wetlands Agro Pastoral Landscapes in the Western Area of the Jilin Province.

**Figures 8 & 9: Examples of new reference books on marine biodiversity in the PRE**



Source: PMO/QDIPNR/JCWDPNRR

**Figures 10 & 11: Examples of new reference books on marine biodiversity in the YRE**



Source: MTR team and PMO.

100. **Output 4.6** *Increased stakeholder awareness for marine biodiversity conservation and estuarine ecosystems.* The Project has demonstrated highly satisfactory progress in achieving this output. The creation and training of the six ECVGs mentioned under Outputs 3.3 and 4.2 has enabled the 590 volunteers involved to not only become more aware of marine biodiversity conservation, but take an active part in applying and promoting it in their fishing communities. MPA managers and decision-makers in the provincial and municipal governments of Guangdong and Shandong are also aware of the benefits of biodiversity conservation, although more needs to be done to increase exposure of the project’s main activities with decision-makers from sectors such as agriculture, housing, industry and transport.

101. The MTR team also found its public awareness exercises in schools supported by school trips to visitor centres already established in some of the MPAs in both the PRE and YRE have been highly effective in raising the awareness of large groups of school children and teachers on the importance of conserving and protecting marine biodiversity and habitats in both estuaries (see figures 12 and 13). From interviews and data compiled in Table 6 (see section 4.6), the MTR team estimates that well over 1,000 school children and teachers have been engaged in these exercises directly, or indirectly, in the three schools supported to date in the YRE and two in the PRE. For example, in the YRE 400 reference books on

marine biodiversity have been distributed to schools in Dongying linked to the LBRC-NSMPA (Chenyang School and Guangligang Primary School) and beach cleaning has taken place involving school children associated with the DEE-NSPMA. In addition, over 300 children from Dongying schools participated in a painting competition on marine biodiversity.

**Figures 12 & 13: Awareness raising exercises on marine biodiversity in PRE and YRE**



Source: PMO.

102. **Progress in delivering immediate outcome 4** (as defined in Chapter 3) - *The number of people/civil society organisations participating to protect, restore, conserve, monitor and sustainably use the ecological goods and services of YRE and PRE increases each year from 2021 – is highly satisfactory.* This is substantiated by the fact the late start of Project 045 in 2020 has enabled it to capitalise on the high level of public investment already spent on developing environmental education in schools and constructing new reception centres, education and research facilities in the MPAs and in Dongying, Qingdao and Zhuhai cities since 2017. For example, a new science centre has been upgraded and will open in January 2023 in Zhuhai City to promote the conservation of the Chinese White Dolphin (see Figure 14). In Qingdao City an educational centre has created a highly innovative marine room that enables children to explore marine biodiversity found at the neuston, plankton, nekton and benthos levels of the sea using imitation periscopes (see Figure 15) and other interactive equipment.

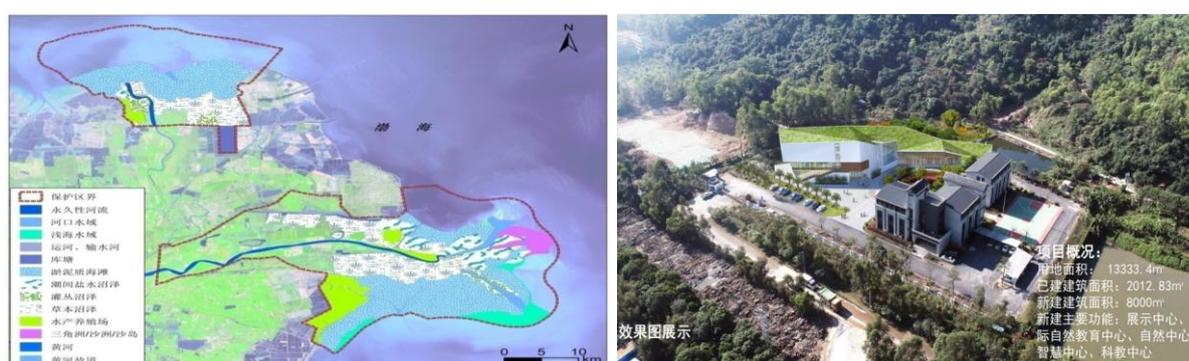
**Figures 14 & 15: Interactive educational centres on marine biodiversity in the PRE and YRE**



Source: MTR team

103. Achievement of the **wider outcome from Component 4 by 2025** - *The growth of data and the knowledge base on the economic, social and environmental benefits of MPAs increases civil society’s commitments to protect and conserve them and a reduction of illegal practices* – is also likely. The national drive to increase investment in ecological civilisation to create a more harmonious society with nature in the PRC provides a strong indication that the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE will continue to develop the data and knowledge base. In the YRE this will be facilitated by the official launch of the YRE National Park and the implementation of its Action Plan in the near future (see figure 16). Indeed, the knowledge base for the MPA network of six MPAs will be merged into a larger data base covering all 8 MPAs in the YRE plus a new site around the old Yellow River delta. In the PRE there is also evidence the data and knowledge base will continue to expand in support of marine biodiversity conservation.

**Figures 16 & 17: Plans for a National Park in the YRE and blue carbon town in the PRE**



Source: PMO

104. For example, the QDIPNR informed the MTR mission that the development of an ecological civilisation education centre (see Figure 17) is planned to support the creation of China’s first blue carbon demonstration town in Zhuhai’s Qi’ao Mangrove Wetland Ecological Park and development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Nature Reserve Research Centre. The potential to expand eco-tourism and research in both estuaries is also aided by the unique biodiversity found there that have the potential to become major eco-tourist attractions. For example, the Suaeda salsa (seepweed) marshes that turn red in the YRE in the early autumn (see figure 18), and the high number of bird species (over 260) that can be found in the NFNNR, which is only 922 ha in size (see Figure 19).

**Figures 18 & 19: The spectacular YRDNNR in Autumn and bird watching in the NFNNR**



Source: PMO

#### *4.2.5 Achievement of project outputs and progress towards project outcomes under component 5 – Project management, monitoring and evaluation and replication of Project results.*

105. In line with the ToC assessment conducted in Chapter 3 of this report, the MTR team consider the allocation of “outputs” of the PMO under a fifth component should be reconsidered as either inputs to support the achievement of project outputs, outcomes and objectives under components 1-4 or refer to efficiency issues, such as the number of reports, newsletters and external reviews and evaluations to be conducted. For this reason, and in the interests of avoiding repetition, the main elements of Component 5 have been reviewed under sections 4.3 and 4.5.

#### *4.2.6 Overall progress towards meeting the project’s objective to mainstream the conservation of estuarine biodiversity in economic sector development plans and develop a series of “best practices” based on experiences derived from project supported field activities focusing on the creation of protected area networks and wetland conservation and restoration in the Yellow and Pearl River Estuaries*

106. The overall physical advance of the project’s outputs and progress in meeting targets and immediate outcomes amounts is estimated to be around **50 per cent** of all planned actions. This is considered to be highly satisfactory when considering the Project has only been operational since the Inception Workshop held on 23 June 2020 and there is sufficient evidence to indicate it can achieve its objective in the 33 months remaining before five years of operations have been completed in June 2025. This is particularly the case in the YRE where the imminent launch of the new National Park in the YRE will guarantee the injection of significant new resources. However, if the date of entry of duty (EoD) on 12/06/2017 is applied, the project’s overall physical advance is well behind schedule. As a result, it is highly unlikely the Project can achieve its objective by the planned closure date, which has already been extended to 04/02/2023.

### **4.3 Efficiency**

#### **MTR question 3 – To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost-effectively?**

**Finding 6:** The Project is demonstrating it can deliver its activities and outputs in a timely, efficient and cost-effective manner, despite the challenges of the zero—tolerance policy on the COVID-19 pandemic in China. This has been achieved primarily by the PMO’s high productivity rates, which are exemplified by the fact Project 045 has achieved or surpassed several output targets while only spending 22.5 per cent of GEF funds to 30/09/2022, or around 30 per cent of GEF funds if including pending payments for work completed by this date.

**Finding 7:** The project has successfully leveraged substantial in-kind co-finance to support its main actions, especially in the YRE, where it has directly supported the creation of a new National Park in the YRE. The MTR team found in such cases, GEF projects can add significant value at relatively low cost because they align with the priorities of the government.

#### 4.3.1 *Timeliness of activities*

107. Reference to the previous section 4.2 indicates the project's capacity to convert its resources into outputs and outcomes under Components 1-4 is estimated to be 60, 40, 50 and 40 per cent respectively of planned activities to 30 September 2022. This equates to an overall implementation rate of around **48 per cent** of planned outputs. When considering the EoD of Project 045 was on 12 June 2017, but the inception workshop did not take place until 23 June 2020, it is evident three years of implementation have been lost. As a result, physical progress with respect to the EoD is well behind schedule. Moreover, despite the extension of the Project to 04 February 2023, it is evident Project 045 has insufficient time left to complete its planned outputs and achieve its expected outcomes and objective.

108. However, implementation since the inception workshop in June 2020 has been satisfactory, especially when considering main activities started during the COVID-19 pandemic. In particular, Project 045 has implemented 48 per cent of its planned activities in less than 27.5 months since the inception workshop took place. This achievement has been aided by some important developments since 2017:

- The Project is operating in a far more favourable policy framework than when the Project was identified and officially started in 2017. As previously stated in section 4.1, the Chinese authorities have pressed on with their biodiversity conservation commitments in both the PRE and YRE since the Project was first endorsed by the GEF Secretariat in 2013 and the EoD in 2017. Most significant has been commitments at the highest level to create a new National Park in the YRE amid calls by President Xi to step up ecological protection and civilization in October 2019 following its integration of the concept into China's Constitution in 2018;
- The major institutional reshuffle completed in 2018 has ensured all matters concerning PA policies, strategies and plans in China are under the control and management of the NFGA. Interviews with senior officials confirm this situation has facilitated NFGA's role of mainstreaming ecological protection and conservation into national and sector policy planning, as well as to popularise the importance of restoring, conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity into the mindset of Chinese society (ecological civilisation);
- The signing of a new Execution Agreement between FAO and NFGA in August 2019 has enhanced the ownership of the Project by matching the Project with the

right executing partner that has representation at the national and provincial government levels and a mandate to convoke meetings with different sectors to support the abovementioned mainstreaming process;

- The PEC is represented by professors from an array of universities and research institutions who have demonstrated they can provide the quality assurance needed to avoid policy overlaps, or potential conflicts that may hinder the development of the policy, legal, regulatory and planning framework for MPA networks.
- The PMO's team leader is a member of the review panel for the master plan for the YRE National Park. This has ensured the Project's main activities, such as the GIS database development, have been tailored to the supporting the future management needs of the National Park, rather than exclusively for the network of six MPAs as originally planned in the Prodoc.
- The PMO has been able access significant public co-finance to support the implementation of the majority of the Project's planned activities on time and, thus avoid major delays in implementing the vast majority of activities foreseen in the annual work plans. Moreover, this situation has reduced the PMO's dependency on GEF funding, which interviews indicated has been slow in arriving due to FAO's rules on compliance governing disbursements to projects applying the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM).
- The PMO has applied a performance scoring system to support its internal assessment of the quality of the work provided by the PEC. The scoring system includes an assessment of the timeliness of the quality assurance applied by PEC members.

109. Nonetheless, the MTR team identified a small number of activities that have experienced delays. First, only two of the ten training courses planned (under Output 4.1) to support senior officials at the provincial and municipal government levels develop and apply informed decision-making on marine biodiversity protection and conservation have taken place. Considering the importance of developing this capacity to steer, for example, the implementation of the updated management plans for the 11 MPAs (under Output 2.2), or to enhance the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation into sector policies and plans, the MTR team considers more training courses should have been realised to 30/09/2022. Second, the MTR team found the number of cross-site visits to be lower than planned and also too *ad hoc* in nature, rather than part of a programme of cross-site visits with a clear plan of tasks and achievements to be fulfilled. Third, the international training sessions planned to develop South-South cooperation (Output 4.4) in areas such as co-management, applying ecosystem approaches to estuarine biodiversity conservation, or development of ecological health monitoring, have not materialised to date. The MTR team understands the

strict COVID-19 rules on international travel has been a factor in preventing these international training sessions from taking place.

#### 4.3.2 *Cost-effectiveness of the project*

110. Since the Inception workshop in June 2020, the project's cost-effectiveness has been satisfactory to 30/09/2022. The MTR team identified four main factors supporting this development. First, the executing partner (NFGA/FIO) has a clearer mandate on MPA management, which has facilitated the PMO to take on a more proactive role in coordinating operations with partners to deliver the project's outputs and outcomes reported in Section 4.2. Moreover, by operating out of FIO's Headquarters in Qingdao City in Shandong Province the PMO staff are only a three-hour drive away from the YRE.

111. Second, the estimated overall physical advance of Project 045 to 30/09/2022 has been achieved at relatively low cost. Reference to Table 3 below, confirms only 20.1 per cent of GEF Funds (USD 705,355) have been spent so far to achieve an overall physical advance of around 48 per cent to 30/09/2020. This has been achieved largely thanks to the considerable amount of co-finance that has been provided by the Provincial Governments. Reference to Table 5 below shows that over USD 35.9 m. has been provided in the form of in-kind support, especially from the Provincial Governments of Shandong and Guangdong. This is **15 times more in-kind support than originally planned** in the Prodoc and indicates that for every US Dollar spent so far from GEF funds (USD 791,489) a total of USD 45.40 of co-finance has been leveraged to 30/09/2022. This rises to USD 46.80 when including cash expenditure to 30/09/2022 (USD 1,117,223).

112. Third, the PMO's productivity has been high, especially when considering the large number of activities and outputs delivered so far under section 4.2 have been achieved without a Chief Technical Adviser (CTA), or specialists to coordinate key themes such as ecological monitoring, communications and knowledge management, or gender equality. Several factors have contributed to this high level of productivity observed. These include, among others:

- The PMO team leader and his staff have been appointed on a full-time basis, which has avoided the problem of divided loyalties found in many GEF-funded projects in China where part-time officials are overloaded with both institutional duties and project implementation;
- The PMO team leader is a highly qualified oceanographer who has already demonstrated he can draw on his in-depth work experience and lobbying capacity to capture far more co-finance than originally planned, as well as align Project 045 with current priorities of the national and provincial governments, in particular the development of the new National Park planned in the YRE. For example, the PMO team leader has been instrumental in securing the Shandong Provincial Government's agreement to provide co-finance for the baseline studies of the MPA network in the PRE, on the grounds the baseline data will be needed

to support the creation, management and monitoring of the new National Park planned in this estuary;

- The PMO applies an internal quality assurance mechanism to support staff, contractors and subcontractors deliver documents, reports, training materials, and other outputs to a satisfactory standard. This has been achieved with the support of the PEC and enabled the PMO to identify gaps affecting the project's cost-effectiveness. For example, between 2020 and 2021, the PMO was limited to employing only short-term sub-contractors and consultants (11 in total). This was primarily due to the "moderate" risk rating applied in the risk assessment conducted by FAO prior to concluding the third amendment to the EA in April 2021. In response, the PMO called for a new risk assessment in January 2022, which reversed the risk rating to "low" risk. As a result, the PMO is now able to apply a more cost-effective recruitment process of the expertise it needs to deliver results;
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the PMO has had to adopt online solutions in order to continue its meetings, conferences, workshops and trainings. This situation has enabled stakeholders to meet more regularly and develop networking skills at relatively low cost. This has proved to be a particularly cost-effective way of supporting the MPA managers develop the MPA networks planned in the PRE and YRE, especially since the signing of the information sharing agreement in 2020.

113. Notwithstanding these achievements, the MTR team identified three issues that prevent the Project from optimising its cost-effectiveness. Firstly, FAO-CN is mainly responsible under the EA to provide administrative and quality assurance services. In the absence of a CTA, FAO's technical oversight is provided mainly by the LTO. However, the LTO is based in RAP-FAO (Bangkok, Thailand). Due to the zero-tolerance policy in China, the LTO has been unable to visit Project 045 to attend PSC meetings and conduct field visits since operations began in 2020. Secondly, there is lack of direct participation of some key sectors in at the Provincial Government levels in particular that cause a negative impact on biodiversity restoration and conservation efforts, such as agriculture, fisheries, industry, housing and transport, among others. Thirdly, synergies have been slow to materialise, especially with other GEF-funded projects managed by FAO or UNDP, although a MoU is foreseen with a project supporting MPA management in the Southeaster coastal area of China and implemented with the support of UNDP by the end of 2022. More information on this can be found in Section 4.5.

#### 4.3.3 *GEF funding and co-finance*

114. Total expenditure of GEF funding at 30 September 2022 amounts to USD 791,489, which corresponds to **22.5 per cent of the GEF budget** agreed for Project 045 (see Table 4). As mentioned in sub-section 4.3.2 this level of expenditure is low compared to the estimated overall physical progress rate of 48 per cent to 30/09/2022. The PMO informed the MTR team that the low level of expenditure is partly explained by the fact some

ongoing contracts have not yet submitted invoices for work conducted in 2022. This would indicate that the real expenditure rate is around 32 per cent, which still indicates Project 045 is delivering value for money.

**Table 4: Summary of current status of GEF expenditure in USD (to 30 September 2020)**

Component	Revised Budget (2019)*	Expenditure Jun 2017 to Jun 2021	Expenditure Jul 2021 to Jun 2022	Expenditure Jul 2022 to Sept 2022	Total Expenditure 30/09/2022	Total Balance 30/09/2022
Component 1	485,573	73,053	110,601	921	<b>184,575</b>	300,998
Component 2	1,005,996	92,796	43,315	12,208	<b>148,319</b>	857,677
Component 3	731,752	53,486	51,166	25,915	<b>130,567</b>	601,185
Component 4	606,427	60,982	53,404	23,030	<b>137,416</b>	469,011
Component 5	335,498	37,834	2,181	5,993	<b>46,008</b>	289,490
Proj. Managemt.	351,154	81,567	44,970	18,067	<b>144,604</b>	206,550
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3,516,400</b>	<b>399,718</b>	<b>305,637</b>	<b>86,134</b>	<b>791,489</b>	<b>2,724,911</b>

Source: PMO \*Note a total of USD 145,839 was reassigned from Components 1-5 to Project Management (FAO) in the Execution Agreement No. 3 signed between FAO and NFGA, on 12 April 2021.

115. Analysis of the ratio of GEF expenditure to the number of end beneficiaries who have directly participated in Project 045, indicates that on average USD 493 has been spent on each direct end beneficiary registered so far. The MTR team identified that a total of 590 volunteers, approximately 1,000 school children and teachers and 30 adults from the private sector have directly participated in the Project's activities to 30/09/2022. This amounts to an estimated total of 1,620 direct beneficiaries, which at first sight would suggest GEF funding is not achieving the outreach expected. However, the Prodoc does not provide a target on the total number of direct beneficiaries by the end of Project 045 and the majority of project activities are dedicated to institutional capacity building linked to threat assessments, policy development, GIS mapping and planning, database development, ecological restoration and monitoring, among others. Specific support to local communities mainly focuses on educational outreach activities and specialised training of civil society to develop volunteer groups and small enterprise development promoting sustainable fisheries and the development of ecotourism services.

116. Reference to Table 5 shows co-finance totals USD 37,037,641 to 30/09/2022 against total planned co-finance of 12,018,480. This confirms Chinese partners have provided over USD 25 m. more co-finance than planned. This is a highly satisfactory level of co-finance after just 27.5 months of operations since the inception workshop in June 2020 and a major factor facilitating the physical advance of 48 per cent estimated to 30/09/2022.

117. Analysis of Table 5 reveals the following positive developments. First, the in-kind contributions of USD 28.08 m. from Shandong Provincial Government are over 35 times (3,500%) more than originally planned in the Prodoc (USD 789,527) for reasons described

above in sub-section 4.3.2 as well as other initiatives such as ecological compensation to turn agricultural land back to wetlands. Second, the Guangdong Provincial Government has provided in-kind contributions of USD 7.7 m., which is over 9 times (900%) more co-finance than planned (USD 747,035) and also attributed to supporting research and ecological compensation in the PRE. Third, FIO's cash expenditure of 220,373, is already USD 170,073 more than the allocated budget of USD 50,300 in the Prodoc. In this case, the MTR team understands, the FIO have provided additional finance to cover logistical costs, equipment and the recruitment of PMO staff not covered by GEF funds.

**Table 5. Summary of current status of co-finance in USD (to 30 September 2022)**

Name of co-financing partner	Amount agreed by CEO on 22/02/2013		Amount materialised to MTR on 30/09/2022		Amount remaining at 30/09/2022	
	Cash	In kind	Cash	In kind	Cash	In kind
	FIO/NFGA/MNR	50,300	648,304	<b>220,373</b>	<b>9,446</b>	- 170,073
Guangdong Prov.	6,025,100	747,035	<b>802,610</b>	<b>7,729,079</b>	5,222,490 -	6,982,044
Shandong Prov.	3,526,000	789,527	<b>47,120</b>	<b>28,085,268</b>	3,478,880 -	27,295,741
DeepNature Ltd*	-	-	<b>47,120</b>	-	- 47,120	-
FAO	139,300	92,914	-	<b>96,625</b>	139,300 -	3,711
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9,740,700</b>	<b>2,277,780</b>	<b>1,117,223</b>	<b>35,920,418</b>	<b>8,623,477 -</b>	<b>33,642,638</b>

Source: PMO; \* Note DeepNature provided their own funds to demonstrate their interest to participate in the long-term development of the GIS database in FIO.

## 4.4 Sustainability

### **MTR question 4 – What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?**

**Finding 8:** The sustainability of the MPA network in the YRE is highly likely due to the decision to launch the YRE National Park in 2023, which is planned to have its own management authority and budget totaling approximately CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion) over five years. However, it is less evident in the PRE network where several risks are still likely to have an impact on its sustainability, especially the lack of cross-sector coordination to manage overlapping mandates and laws of different sector agencies that operate in MPA jurisdictions.

**Finding 9:** The Project has largely overlooked the importance of integrating risk management in its planning, implementation and monitoring. As a result, the MTR team found key areas of capacity development (especially on adaptive management) have not been adequately addressed in the interests of establishing sustainable and resilient estuarine ecosystems and communities.

118. The MTR team's analysis of the level of risk management applied by Project 045 was found to be low. For example, analysis of the PIRs and PPRs indicate the updating of Section 6 of the PIR (on Risks) is no more than an administrative exercise. Moreover, the PIRs continue to cut and paste the mitigation measures provided in the Prodoc that refer to 2010, rather than 2022. As a result, the mitigation measures are out of date and play no role in guiding decisions on the project's planning and implementation. For example, risk mitigation measures for Risk 1, refer to favourable shifts in government priorities on environmental protection that began in 2007 and references are made to new developments in the 12th Five-year Plan, while Project 045 is operating under the 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan 2021-2025.

119. The PMO's self-assessment report provided to the MTR team in October 2022 recognises that more attention is needed to integrate risk management into its operations by saying, *"risk mitigation plan has been never updated... the risk mitigation effect is not included in the internal M&E system and incorporated into PPR and PIR. PMO needs to update the following risk mitigation strategy and incorporate the risk mitigation monitoring into internal M&E system and present the monitoring results into PPR and PIR".*<sup>21</sup> This also indicates the decision to change the overall risk rating from "moderate" in PIR1 and PIR2, to "low" in the latest PIR3 (2021-2022) based on the justification that all risks have been mitigated because Project 045 is now operational and therefore able to apply the mitigation measures is not an accurate way to assess risk. Indeed, the MTR team's own findings following its completion of the RM in Appendix 6, indicate that almost all of the risk ratings in PIR3 are not accurate. This is explained with reference to the risk categories highlighted in bold in sub-section 4.4.1 below and which are suggested in the GEF-FAO Guidelines for MTRs. The MTR team wishes to point out that **the risk categories listed in the MTR Guidelines are not applied in the Prodoc and the PIRs**. As a result, it is difficult for the MTR team to assess how far certain risk categories have been successfully, or unsuccessfully mitigated over time by the Project's stakeholders. This is important, because it would provide important evidence as to how far risk management is being treated as an important horizontal exercise to guide project planning, implementation and monitoring to achieve positive and sustainable outcomes.

#### *4.4.1 Socio-political, financial, institutional, governance and environmental risks to sustainability*

120. **Political risks are "low-moderate"**. Risk 2 in the PIR states the risk of slow uptake of policy recommendations produced with the support of the Project is "low". The MTR team largely agrees with this rating, on the grounds the government reshuffle in 2018 has removed the risks associated with fragmented policies governing the way PAs were managed by a large number of different public institutions. Currently, the political landscape is much clearer. In particular, the MNR/NFGA is responsible for the

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<sup>21</sup> Draft Mid-term Review Summary Report, prepared by the PMO (October 2022), Section 4.4 Risk Management and Mitigation, p. 62.

management of all PAs in China, while MEE is responsible for monitoring and assessing PA management performance. As a result, neither the MNR, nor MEE, have to play the dual roles of managers and judges any more.

121. Nevertheless, the political restructuring of government in 2018, which included greater devolution of powers to provincial and local governments, continues to be highly vertical in nature. As a result, the political space to develop important horizontal governance structures (coordination mechanisms) to guide and steer cross-sector engagement and cooperation on restoring, conserving and sustainably using natural resources in MPAs, remains weak and the MTR team believes this justifies a risk rating of low-moderate. This finding has been triangulated through interviews and a study of key documents produced by Project 045. For example, the Landscape and Land use change studies completed in the PRE and YRE highlight the problem of overlapping political mandates and laws that operate within MPA jurisdictions. Interviews confirm this complicates the development of effective co-management, ecological and social MPA networks, and coordinated law enforcement in the PRE and YRE.

122. **Social risks are “moderate”.** The risks associated with social unawareness of the importance of restoring, conserving and sustainably using estuarine ecosystems are evident and likely to impact negatively on marine ecosystems. For example, several studies completed by Project 045 and triangulated through remote interviews and field visits confirm solid waste and water pollution caused by agricultural runoff, industrial effluent and sewage discharge continue to be major problems in both PRE and YRE. In addition, an interview with FIO in Qingdao City (Shandong) confirms parts of the YRE are currently suffering from eutrophication caused mainly by agricultural fertilisers. The stepping up of ecological civilisation is designed to address this, and there is evidence that Project 045 is responding through its education outreach activities and the mobilisation of volunteer groups dedicated to protecting MPAs through beach clean-up campaigns and supporting surveillance. Meanwhile, the promotion of Innovative approaches to developing sustainable jobs in the MPAs are demonstrating the MPAs can deliver economic, ecological, socio-cultural and spiritual development all at the same time. For example, the study on creating sustainable jobs in the PRE proposes local guides are trained to meet the socio-cultural and spiritual needs of eco-tourists and promote education and research on marine biodiversity, rather than becoming conventional information guides. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that this approach is only partially addressing the goal of ecological civilisation; namely harmony with nature. For example, the MTR team found little evidence to confirm stakeholders and local communities have been trained on applying the waste management hierarchy, in particular prioritising waste prevention, reduction and reuse measures at home, in schools and in the workplace.

123. **Institutional risks are “moderate”.** The Project enjoys strong support from FIO and NFGA. This has been demonstrated by the high amount of co-finance that has been leveraged to support implementation of main activities since 2020 (see Table 4). In

addition, the PMO and FIO have been active in the identification and design phases of the new National Park planned in the YRE, which will incorporate at least five of the six MPAs supported by Project 045. An interview with NFGA also confirms the PSC members are able to lobby the support of decision-makers from other institutions to support the mainstreaming of biodiversity conservation. However, it remains unclear how this will deliver change when there is a lack of a cross-sector platform with a dedicated secretariat to implemented decisions on mainstreaming.

124. Also significant is that the METT assessments confirm at least eight of the 11 MPAs supported by Project 045 have difficulties in implementing their master plans. A major reason is MPA management teams lack adequate capacity and resources. This is not aided by fragmented law enforcement agencies operating under different rules and regulations at the national, provincial and local government levels. Addressing this issue at the PSC level is not aided by the fact there is, (i) no national PA system in place to support and guide the application of common standards and procedures concerning law enforcement in PAs, (ii) there are no representative from MEE (ecological monitoring), other institutions that have important regulatory roles in the PRE and YRE. These include, among others the Bureau of Fisheries (fish catches and protection of sea mammals, MWR (water pollution), or the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (sewage). Consequently, there are no focal points through which the Project can enjoy direct access to their regulatory bodies to discuss gaps and barriers to effective law enforcement in the PRE and YRE. establishment of the PA system by NFGA River basin (in particular its middle reaches). For these reasons the **MTR believes institutional risks pose a major threat to sustaining project results and should therefore be re-ranked to “medium-high”** as well as flagged for new mitigation measures to be discussed and agreed.

125. **Financial risks are “low”**. There is strong evidence to indicate the national government is committed to increasing public investment on ecological compensation, restoration and monitoring and improving funding for MPA management teams. This is clearly demonstrated in Table 4 above, which shows public investment in the restoration of wetland and seascape habitats has grown since 2020 in the YRE and PRE. Interviews and field visits also indicate the creation of the new National Park in the YRE will be supported by a considerable budget to continue and widen the process of marine biodiversity restoration, conservation and its sustainable use on a long-term basis in line with President Xi’s goal to pass on China’s natural resources to the next generation. Its five-year budget is estimated will be around CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion).

126. Three caveats identified that have not been addressed in the studies and assessments conducted to date are: (i) one of the MPAs in the YRE network (GP-NSMPA) is not planned to be included in the new YRE National Park. In this specific case, there is a substantial risk it will have insufficient resources to sustain key activities such as ecological networking and monitoring unless new resources are found; (ii) the raising of internal revenue to support the financial sustainability of the MPAs and their networks. The MTR

team found opportunities exist to raise income to support restoration and conservation work. For example, this could be achieved by charging an entry fee (especially for boats and vehicles docking/parking in/near the MPAs), or by applying a small environmental levy on goods sold in Zhuhai and Dongying Cities that are known, or likely to generate negative impacts in the MPAs; (iii) the rise in fuel prices due to the current global energy crisis, which has been exacerbated by the Russian invasion of Ukraine since February 2022. Considering, MPAs depend heavily on sea transport that consumes high amounts of fuel, the need for contingency plans is growing.

127. **Currency exchange risks are “low”.** The MTR agrees with the rating in the latest PIR. The abovementioned global energy crisis and war in Ukraine has caused a significant appreciation in the value of the US Dollar as a safe-haven currency, which is beneficial to the Project. For example, at the start of the war on 20 February the exchange rate was 1 USD: 6.33 CNY, compared to 1 USD: CNY 7.30 on 04/11/2022. Depreciation of the US Dollar is also unlikely to have an effect on the Project’s operations in 2023.<sup>22</sup>

128. **Fiduciary risks are “low”.** This risk is not included in the PIRs, even though it was a basic requirement before the Execution Agreement could be signed with NFGA/FIO in 2019. Furthermore, two fiduciary assessments have been conducted. The first one in 2019 rated as FIO/PMO as "moderate risk". As previously mentioned in this report, this rating dictated the PMO could only recruit a restricted number of consultants. In response to this ruling, the PSC endorsed the PMO’s request for a new fiduciary assessment to be conducted by FAO. This was realized in January 2022 and resulted in a "low risk" rating. This rating appears to be fully justified when referring to the three audits that have been conducted by FAO in June 2021, December 2021 and May 2022. In each case, the audit reports had no findings.

129. **Climate change-related risks are “substantial”.** The PIRs and the PMO’s self-assessment report both provide “low” risk ratings. The MTR team found this rating has overlooked the growing global consensus among most scientists that we are all facing a climate emergency, which has already caused devastating effects in China. Furthermore, the Secretary General of the UN conceded at the COP27 in Egypt, “Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible”;<sup>23</sup> As a result, there is an urgent need to revisit this rating, highlight current gaps in the Project and propose relevant mitigation measures. In particular, the MTR team observed the following tools to develop effective mitigation measures are available: (i) the GIS database could be expanded to include a set of risk maps to pinpoint marine habitats and biodiversity that are most vulnerable to natural (and preferably human-induced) disasters in the PRE and YRE. These would include disasters associated with intensive storms, sea surges, sea-level rise, abnormal rainfall, typhoons and droughts; (ii) the restoration strategies for wetlands,

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<sup>22</sup> Source: Oanda.

<sup>23</sup> Secretary-General's remarks to High-Level opening of COP27, 07 November 2022.

mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs (with emphasis on local varieties) could be expanded to emphasise restoration also supports the development of natural barriers that prevent, slow down, or deviate disasters away from priority sites and human settlements and enhances the carbon cycle at the same time; (iii) the education outreach activities and volunteer activities could be expanded so that there is greater awareness on the dual benefits of conservation and adaptive management and how both enhance resilience and quality of life.

130. **Health-related risks are “moderate”**. The PIR3 has introduced the pandemic as a new risk (Risk 5), but rated this risk as “low”. The MTR team consider this rating has underestimated the negative impact caused by the continuation of the no tolerance policy by the Chinese authorities to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, this policy risks delaying and/or downsizing some of the Project’s activities concerning international exchanges and trainings. Besides this it restricts project personnel from any travel when COVID-19 cases are reported in the Project sites. For example, Dongying City has experienced COVID-19 outbreaks that have resulted in temporary lockdowns and forced project staff into quarantine for a mandatory 14 calendar days. As a result, a moderate rating is considered fully justified and merit mitigation measures to be identified. Most pressing appears to be the identification of online training solutions to mitigate the inability to conduct international travel.

#### *4.4.2 Evidence of replication or catalysis of project results*

131. The Prodoc states the publication and dissemination of at least five “best practices” and “lessons learned” derived from project-supported activities are produced to support their scaling up in other Chinese estuarine MPA networks and the further mainstreaming of estuarine wetlands biodiversity and ecosystems conservation in sector policies and programmes. In the PMO’s Self-assessment draft report, seven “best practices” have been presented. Each one has been presented as a short “success story” rather than a list of descriptive best practices with information on how they can be scaled up. **The MTR team considers this approach is itself “good practice” for raising awareness and stimulating learning and inquiry on environmental matters**, which is central to ecological civilisation.

132. The following success reviews have been reviewed and, in some cases, triangulated through field interviews. A summary of their scaling up/replication potential in the PRE and YRE and/or in other estuaries in China is provided at the end:

- **Guardian of the sea and the land – environmentally friendly aquaculture**: this success story centres on an entrepreneur who has built up a sustainable covered aquaculture enterprise since 2008 that avoids the problems associated with open air fish ponds. The MTR field mission confirms the enterprise demonstrates win-win situations for: (i) the environment because it does not rely on wetland habitats

to produce fish and all waste water is treated; (ii) the local community by providing education and tourist facilities and creating employment for 80 people; (iii) the local economy by supporting a shift to lower impact activities such as ecotourism and recreational activities, including recreational fishing and; (iv) the enterprise itself by generating profits to both sustain and grow the business and fund environmental initiatives. These include, setting up a volunteer group of 50 members to carry out beach cleaning exercises, life guard services and first aid for tourists, etc. Since 2021, Project 045 has been cooperating with this local pioneer in areas such as ecological research, educating students, tourists and local government staff, and providing technical assistance to guide the expansion of the business (construction of a new 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> plant). The MTR team concludes this business model is potentially highly replicable, but this is dependent on a feasibility study on energy consumption and how inputs such as water and fish food are sourced.

- **Environmental conservation lectures in Qi'ao Island – taking education to the people:** the main element of this success story has been how a series of public awareness raising and training exercises supported by Project 045 have stimulated the trainer of trainers' model. As a result, local residents have been empowered to take up the position of science tutors, research tutors, and nature education tutors in their local communities. According to one of the tutors interviewed, local residents are intrigued to attend the lectures and participation rates are reported to be high when they take place. As a result, the drive for co-management of the MPA is being driven by the local community itself. The MTR team concludes this training approach is a good practice that can be up-scaled in the PRE and YRE as well as replicated to other MPAs. Moreover, one of the residents explained that this approach offers local people an opportunity to learn and make new friends at the same time.

**Figures 18 & 19: Dongying Delta Aquaculture Co. Education Centre and winning paint**



Source: MTR team and PMO

133. **Protecting the Yellow River with a Paintbrush – stimulating visual and spiritual identity with nature:** the MTR team selected this success story for review, because the painting competition promoted by Project 045 attracted over 300 participants, but

was won by a child in only fifth grade (see Figure 19). The main reason, is that he describes how the painting competition made him change the way he sees the YRE. Like many children and adults alike, he thought the YRE was just “a big river wrapped in sand... the riverway had many cracks like a broken mirror... there was only dry land and no plants.” However, after consulting books, pictures and educational material, he was intrigued to find it was instead “a very beautiful wetland... protecting rare and endangered birds. He set about to paint this transition in his mind from negative to positive in such a way that others who had the same original thoughts could have, “a new understanding of the Yellow River through my painting”. The MTR team found this interactive approach to sensitising school children (and adults) to visualise the previously unknown spiritual value of marine habitats and their biodiversity is good practice and can be both up-scaled and replicated elsewhere in China at relatively low cost. Moreover, it appears the exercise stimulates transformational change, both in terms of attitude (wanting to learn more) and practice (reducing waste, saving water and energy, etc.).

134. From the MTR team’s own analysis and site visits, it identified two good practices that should be considered for scaling up and promoting their replication in other estuaries where the ecological characteristics are similar. The first concerns the ecological production of mitten crab by the Shandong Huize Industrial Development Group, which is highly profitable and generates financial support for community initiatives (see Figure 18). The second, is the production of mangrove juice from one species of mangrove tree. A site visit to Qi’ao Mangrove Nature Reserve included an interview with a local resident that has participated in the environmental conservation lectures. In her particular case she has produced a mangrove juice that be mixed with Chinese snacks, or steamed with rice for both consumption and treatment of rheumatism. This practice has attracted a lot of interest among residents and tourists because it promotes income generation, supports income generation from the restoration of mangroves and a traditional medicine that is reported to alleviate Rheumatoid arthritis.

## 4.5 Factors affecting performance

**MTR question 5 – *What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?***

**Finding 10:** The Project’s design was found to be outdated and its logical framework in need of revision to improve both its vertical and horizontal causal logic. Currently, outcomes are not always clear and are too numerous to facilitate effective monitoring of results to be achieved to reach the Project’s objective and goal. Some outputs were also found to be misplaced under the wrong component and the indicators mainly refer to targets.

**Finding 11:** The current implementation of the Project by FAO requires FAO-CN to provide administrative support and quality assurance, but is not required to provide technical oversight. As a result, FAO-CN relies heavily on the support of the LTO who, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has not been able to visit the Project to date and, instead, is restricted to providing remote support only. Overall, the MTR found FAO-CN should be engaged in both technical and administrative oversight of GEF-funded projects so that there is a technical communication channel operating between the LTO, FAO-CN and the PMOs. In this way FAO-CN would have a mandate to respond to and address the specific needs and interests of the PMOs and PSCs, play a proactive role in stimulating formal synergies, and overseeing information exchange and data sharing between GEF projects in China becomes mutually reinforcing to enhance FAO's visibility.

**Finding 12:** The PMO has delivered high productivity, but needs more support and training from key stakeholders such as FAO-RAP and the PEC to manage more effectively and efficiently key tasks and duties, such as knowledge management and developing synergies with other projects. Currently FAO-CN does not have the technical capacity to coordinate this between FAO-RAP and the PEC. This situation has contributed to overloading PMO staff, which is likely to affect performance if the Project is extended.

#### 4.5.1 *Project design and readiness*

135. The delay of seven years in starting Project 045 between the GEF endorsement in 2013 and the inception workshop in June 2020 has resulted in some aspects of the Project's design becoming out of date. An analysis of the Project's outputs indicates that most of them have stood up well to the test of time. Indeed, as mentioned in Section 4.1, the majority remain highly relevant to main stakeholders, which helps to explain the highly satisfactory levels of physical implementation reported in Section 4.2 and high levels of co-finance secured to date (see Section 4.3). Nonetheless, during the formulation of the RM, some outputs are no longer valid, in particular Output 2.3 (creation of at least one new provincial level MPA). In other cases, they need of updating and/or relocating to a different component to strengthen their causal logic. For example, reference to the RM in Appendix 6 shows Output 1.7 (operational effectiveness) is more relevant to Component 2, while Output 3.1 needed segregating so that the investment strategies could be relocated to Component 1. Similarly, Output 3.4 refers to the development of multi-agency integrated monitoring plans, which are more relevant to Component 1.

136. Analysis of outcomes has already been conducted in Chapter 3. The four immediate and wider outcomes established for each of the four main components of the Project have been reviewed in the RM in Appendix 6 to the analysis of results and identification of gaps. This exercise also facilitated the fine tuning of the four outcomes selected and final adjustments to the ToC in Appendix 9. The main finding from this exercise is the identification of an important shortcoming in the Project's design; namely its lack of inter-institutional coordination and cooperation with key sectors who operate within MPA jurisdictions under their own mandates, policies and laws. The Prodoc emphasises the

need to achieve a more integrated approach to biodiversity conservation (Outcome 1.2), based on improved institutional coordination (Outcome 1.3) and supported by key developments, such as informed decision-making on ecosystem-based management in the PRE and YRE (Outcome 3.4). However, to achieve the Project has a strong set of outputs dedicated to developing improved intra-institutional coordination, planning and monitoring, but almost no emphasis on inter-institutional engagement. The one exception is Output 3.4, which calls for a multi-agency integrated monitoring plan. As a result, key sectors currently have little, or no sense of ownership of project activities.

137. A second shortcoming in the Project's design is that it largely overlooks the importance of developing adaptive capacity in the management of the MPAs. Despite flagging climate in the risk assessment in the Prodoc, the low-risk rating appears to have largely excluded the need to fully integrate adaptation and resilience into the Project's main activities. Moreover, the mitigation measures assume that watershed management, environmental health monitoring and synergies with other countries will combat the effects of climate change. The MTR team is aware that Project 045 was identified in 2008, but considering China has ratified by the Paris Agreement in September 2016 and the EA has been amended three times, it is evident the formal integration of adaptive management in MPA management planning has not been fully addressed to enhance ecological and societal resilience in the PRE and YRE.

#### *4.5.2 Quality of project execution and management arrangements (including assessment of risks)*

138. In spite of the long delays between the signature of the original Execution Agreement between FAO and NFGA in June 2019 and the third amendment to the EA in April 2021, there is no evidence to indicate the quality of the Project's execution has affected its performance. To the contrary, the union of the NFGA and FIO as executing partners appears to work well at the PSC level and implementation level, where the PMO operates out of FIO's headquarters in Qingdao City, Shandong. The PMO itself has also demonstrated it has the capacity and staff to deliver outputs and results to a high, or satisfactory standard in almost all cases.

139. Caveats identified that have not had any significant effect on operations, but which the MTR team found are still on an orange light, centre on:

- **The current structure of the PSC:** an interview with the PSC found that in the absence of representatives from some key sectors, it relies heavily on communication and lobbying decision-makers from other sectors through its own members. However, most of the members of the PSC are senior staff who have very little time available to carry such tasks on a regular basis.
- **Staffing of the PMO:** the PMO has some staffing gaps that have contributed to high workloads for the PMO team. The absence of a CTA has been especially

missed to provide important guidance, coordination and oversight on the development of an integrated policy, strategic and planning framework for the MPA networks and on identifying training gaps. Indeed, Component 1 neither includes a specific long-term training plan for MPA management teams, nor a coordinated law enforcement plan;

- **Inadequate attention to risk management:** sub-section 4.4.1 highlights the Project's main stakeholders have only paid lip service to managing risk. This is despite the development of remote sensing and the GIS system, which offers new opportunities to apply the threat analysis in risk maps and identify where adaptive management is most needed;
- **Developing synergies to replicate good practices:** despite emphasis in the Prodoc on developing synergies with "related initiatives", no formal synergies have been established to date with other GEF-funded programmes and projects. However, two were found to be in the pipeline (see sub-section 4.5.5).

140. Finally, in terms of project delivery in the demonstration sites in the PRE and YRE, the MTR team did not identify any complaints from local stakeholders or end beneficiaries about the quality of the training and demonstrations that have been carried out by the Project. However, interviewees did say they would like follow-up activities to be planned more regularly and communications improved to share good practices that can be scaled-up at the community level, or which can help identify human and financial resources to promote the expansion of the local enterprises to reduce dependency on fishing.

#### 4.5.3 Project oversight by FAO as the GEF Agency and national partners

141. Project oversight by FAO consists of three main areas of support. First administrative oversight provided by FAO-CN to oversee the implementation of the EA with the Executing Agency, NFGA/FIO in the MNR. To support the BH, the Prodoc foresaw a Project Task Manager (PTM) should assume, "*the supervision of financial management, project progress, procurement and contracting processes, and the provision of technical guidance... in close consultation with the LTO, and the Project Task Force*" (p.43). However, since the design of the Prodoc in 2009-2010, the role of the PTM has evolved and was replaced in 2017 by a GEF Portfolio Officer (GPO). The GPO is, however, only responsible for overseeing administrative-related matters. All technical oversight matters are the responsibility of the LTO and her team, based in FAO-RAP, while strategic coordination, support and guidance is provided by the GCU and other services operating out of FAO-R.

142. In theory, the division of labour is clear, but in practice the MTR team found FAO oversight is affected by two issues that would benefit from an internal review to ensure FAO optimises its added-value and visibility in China. The first issue concerns the general lack of technical oversight provided by FAO-CN that can link up with the LTO in FAO-RAP, on the one hand, and the PMO and other GEF-funded projects in China, on the other. This situation is exacerbated by the absence of a CTA for Project 045. This has meant FAO-CN

and Project 045 have depended heavily on the LTO who, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and zero-tolerance policy of the Chinese government, has been unable to visit Project 045 to date. As a result, no back-to-office reports are available and the opportunities to stimulate formal synergies, group activities and training, information and data sharing agreements, comparing good practices and so forth have not materialised so far between GEF-funded projects in China. Moreover, in the few cases where they are emerging, it appears they rely more on the proactive initiatives of the PMO team than through FAO's technical support.

143. The second issue, concerns the lack of a training programme provided by FAO-R for GPOs and PMO staff on two key topics. First, on the application of the EA in line with FAO rules and procedures, especially relating to procurement and the MS-701 Guidelines for the Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM). In particular, there appears to be some confusion as to the exact rules that apply when the Fiduciary Assessment applies a "moderate" risk rating compared to a "low" risk rating (in this case on FIO, as one of the GEF account holders). For example, the MTR team observed more training appears to be necessary on the number of spot-checks and audits that have to be applied according to the risk rating applied. Similarly, what constitutes a spot-check and how often they should be applied to be effective to support the auditing process. In addition, the PMO voiced concerns that the moderate risk rating has limited the number of sub-contracts that can be concluded with technical expertise. Meanwhile, FAO-CN stated that the funding of administrative oversight duties concerning Project 045 remains challenging. This is mainly because GEF funds cover a portion of the administrative costs, while FAO's own Country Programme provides the rest.

144. Second, on the development and management of knowledge products, especially with regards to: (i) capturing and disseminating explicit and implicit knowledge and skills emanating from, for example, local approaches to restoring, conserving and monitoring biodiversity, and on local law enforcement techniques, among others; (ii) improving coordination and collaboration with other GEF-funded projects to facilitate exchanges of information on data, lessons learned and good practices. For example, the LTO has provided Project 045 access to the following documents and webinars, but the MTR team found it is equally important that support and training is provided on how key elements of these documents should be integrated into main activities of the Project:

- May 2021: FAO publication on fishery co-management cases from Asia;
- November 2021: FAO Webinar on, 'Small-scale fishers and fish farmers restoring ecosystems: Stories from Asia';
- December 2021: IUCN's publication, 'Community organizing toolkit on ecosystem restoration';
- March 2022: IUCN's publication 'Aquaculture and Nature-based Solutions'
- July 2022: FAO's 'Guidelines for Protected Areas Management Planning' and IFAD's manual, 'How to use GIS to monitor and evaluate projects.'

145. Oversight provided by the NFGA/FIO was found to be satisfactory. No cases were identified where the national partners have caused delays, or provided inadequate levels of support, guidance and resources. In fact, the NFGA and FIO have been instrumental in securing a lot of in-kind support to advance Project activities. However, two caveats were identified. The first, concerns the need for greater communication between the Project and the GEF Operational Focal Point (OFP), located in the Ministry of Finance. For example, the MTR team was unable to interview the GEF OFP on the grounds such interviews are not granted for MTR exercises. As a result, the MTR team was unable to determine current thinking in China on how far it will continue to support marine biodiversity conservation in GEF-8. According to FAO-CN, support in this area of biodiversity conservation from GEF-8 is "slim". The second, relates to the role of the PEC in supporting and training the PMO and MPA stakeholders in areas such as knowledge management and developing synergies with other projects where there is a mutual interest to exchange information and explore joint ventures.

#### *4.5.4 Financial management and co-financing*

146. The MTR did not identify any major problems associated with the accounting and management of GEF funds. The PMO's self-assessment report confirms three audits have been conducted so far (p. 65). In all three cases they have produced no findings. Concerning the amount of GEF funds allocated to Components 1-5 in the GEF budget, the MTR team found some reallocation of funds may be required if the Project is extended beyond 03/02/2023 given some outputs would benefit from moving to a more appropriate Component (see Appendix 6) and some key outputs are missing from the Prodoc and should be funded to support Project 045 achieve its objective. Concerning the disbursement of GEF funds to FAO-CN, the MTR team identified only minor delays have been experienced in receiving the two instalments realised so far; namely the first instalment of USD 175,820 on 04/05/2018 and the second instalment of USD 811,683 on 27/05/2021.

147. However, the MTR team was informed that the PMO's ability to transfer funds to the MPAs is not possible under MNR's accounting rules and regulations. Instead, MPAs are required to use their own funds/co-finance to cover local costs and then receive payments from the Project. This situation may explain why in-kind payments are high, while cash payments are relatively low (see sub-section 4.3.3).

148. Finally, financial management of the amendments of the EA were found to be satisfactory. For example, the Third Amendment of the EA reached consensus on the need to reallocate USD 145,839 from the Project's budget to cover an extension of activities to 03 February 2023. This included funding to cover the MTR and the terminal evaluation (USD 80,000), additional audit expenses (USD 50,000), the need to apply a second fiduciary assessment (USD 7,839) and prepare the final report (USD 6,000). However, in line with the findings in Section 4.2, Project 045 has only completed 27.5 months of the 60 allocated in the Prodoc.

Consequently, in the event a time extension is granted to June 2025, a review of the Project's budget to cover administrative and technical costs will be required.

#### 4.5.5 *Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement*

149. The lack of participation of some key sectors in the Project remains an important factor in determining how effective the MPA networks can become. The creation of a new National Park in the YRE will offer new opportunities for Project 045 to address this situation, but in the PRE the Project's performance is uncertain. For example, in the JCWDPNNR and ZCWDNNR the MARA/Bureau of Fisheries is responsible for the management and conservation of endangered aquatic species such as the Chinese White Dolphin, law enforcement is the responsibility of Zhuhai's municipal law enforcement team, ecological monitoring is the responsibility of the MEE and the Ministry of Transport is responsible for all sea vessels crossing through the MPAs. The transfer of China's Coast Guard to the People's Armed Police Force following the reshuffle also makes it more difficult to develop co-management approaches to law enforcement in MPAs. According to interviews with PSC members, the preference is that existing members should act as the main focal points to generate collaboration and cooperation in Project-led activities.

150. However, the MTR finds this strategy places heavy emphasis on the lobbying capacity of PSC members and reduces the opportunities to sensitise these sectors on the importance of conserving ecological goods and services of MPAs in their own sectors. Moreover, this could risk a piecemeal approach to such conservation, rather than round tables supporting an internal review on how representatives from key sectors could coordinate operations such as conservation of marine mammals with the Bureau of Fisheries, municipal law enforcement teams and Ministry of Transport.

151. The development of partnerships and formal synergies with other GEF-funded projects managed by FAO and UNDP in China has also not materialised to date. This is mainly because, on the one hand, the opportunity to create synergies with the GEF-funded projects listed in the Prodoc has passed, because they are now closed. This excludes an exchange during the International Bird Week at Poyang Lake in 2021, which involved participants from GEF-funded Projects 052, 045 and 048. Opportunities to develop synergies with newer GEF5 and GEF6-funded projects managed by FAO have also not developed to date. This is despite the fact the MTR team identified potential synergies to share information and even training costs appear to be highly viable with the following projects: (i) Project 057 on water quality monitoring and the application of R-LHA; (ii) Projects 048 and 052<sup>24</sup> on wetland restoration, management and eco-compensation. Synergies with GEF-funded projects managed by UNDP were found to be in the early

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<sup>24</sup> The project titles are: GCP/CPR/052/GFF Piloting Provincial-level Wetland Protected Area System in Jiangxi Province; GCP/CPR/057/GFF A New Green Line: Mainstreaming Biodiversity Conservation Objectives and Practices into China's Water Resources Management Policy and Planning Practice; GCP/CPR/048/GFF Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Land Management in the Soda Saline-alkaline Wetlands Agro Pastoral Landscapes in the Western Area of the Jilin Province.

stages of development. The most significant is a MoU is in the process of development between Project 045 and the GEF6-funded project, “Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant biodiversity”, which is being executed by the NFGA with the support of UNDP between July 2018 and July 2023. The MoU is planned to be signed by December 2023 and will strengthen Project 045’s opportunities to coordinate its activities and data management in areas of common interest with this project, such as conservation efforts of endangered marine species such as the Chinese White Dolphin. In addition, it will enable Project 045 to cooperate directly with the umbrella GEF6-funded China Protected Area System Reform Programme. For example, this programme is supporting efforts to integrate the protection of marine habitats into marine spatial planning aided by the application of ecologically sensitive areas (ESAs) to act as buffer zones and corridors connecting MPAs, which is of particular interest to the PRE. In addition, the MTR was informed PEC members are coordinating coastal management activities with the GEF-funded project, “Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Phase II” also implemented by UNDP, although there is no formal synergy in place so far. Similarly, synergies with the exchange of information on national park developments and networking on bird migration has not materialised so far.<sup>25</sup>

152. Finally, the partnerships established with the private sector were (see sub-section 4.2.2, in particular Output 3.2) show no signs of affecting the Project’s performance. In at least three cases the evidence indicates the engagement of the private sector has actually enhanced performance. This is particularly the case where private companies have invested heavily in eco-friendly activities in the Project sites. For example, the production mitten crab (sub-section 4.2.3) and closed-system fish farming has successfully demonstrated how the private sector can create win-win situations for the environment, the local economy and ecological civilisation. In another example, the company, DeepNature, has shown how the private sector can be encouraged to invest in the long-term development of the GIS system (see Table 5).

#### *4.5.6 Communication, visibility, knowledge management and knowledge products*

153. Project 045 has produced a highly satisfactory level of communication materials to date, which can be accessed by the public. These include, among others:

- Intellectual products and materials for education and research centres;
- Environmental education text and reference books for school children of different ages;
- Journal publications on scientific topics linked to estuary pollution;
- Development/improvement of websites for ten of the eleven MPAs supported by the Project;
- Pamphlets, banners, materials and souvenirs for education campaigns;

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<sup>25</sup> The MTR identified GEF ID 10073: Strengthening the protected area network for migratory bird conservation along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), which includes China, as one potential project where synergies could support Project 045.

- Newspaper articles and local TV stations providing reports and information on the Project;
- Project website;
- Setting up a WeChat Account, which has reportedly already recorded over 10,000 reading hours;
- A coral survey video (also published on FAO's official blog).

154. These knowledge products have been produced without the guidance and support of a communications expert. Instead, the PMO staff have collaborated together in producing these materials and employed an intern for the production of visual communication materials. To enhance the visibility of the Project, the PMO signed up in 2021 to the 'Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-20300' led by UNESCO as a means to identifying opportunities for international coordination and cooperation in research and management of ocean and coastal zone resources. The MTR team understands the PMO has already identified an interest to participate in the Mega-Delta Programme that was launched in 2021 to build up a comprehensive picture of delta dynamics that can be used to support informed decision-making on the conservation and sustainable development of habitats and biodiversity in the PRE and YRE.

155. However, field visits confirm communications between the MPA network remains low, which indicates the Project lacks a communication strategy designed to: (i) improve the outreach of external communications to different audiences with key messages; (ii) an internal communication strategy designed to encourage greater coordination and exchange of information using different media channels, including a development of a mobile phone application promoting an interactive community network to support monitoring of selected fauna and flora (includes the Oriental white stork, Chinese White Dolphin, pangolins, etc.), water quality, hazard monitoring, illegal practices, etc.; (iii) develop partnerships and formal synergies with other GEF-funded projects managed by FAO to enhance information and data exchange, promote South-South and Triangular cooperation, and coordinate online seminars and physical exchanges on key topics of mutual interest, and English translations of key documents to be hosted on FAO and other websites and blogs, among others.

#### *4.5.7 Monitoring and evaluation (M&E), including M&E design, implementation and budget*

156. The Prodoc proposed a fifth component of the Project should be dedicated to "M&E and replication of results". Following the construction of the ToC in Chapter 3 and Appendix 3, the MTR team found this fifth component should instead operate as a cross-cutting operation to monitor progress and achievements of the four main components. Moreover, the TOR of the MTR, together with specific requests from stakeholders, requires an updating of the RM to facilitate effective monitoring of project outcomes. In response, the MTR team completed this exercise to support its analysis in Section 4.2. The revised RM can be found in Appendix 6.

157. An assessment of the M&E system applied by the PMO to record progress and achievements was found to be highly satisfactory considering it has had to apply an out-of-date RM and does not have an M&E specialist. As a result, the MTR team found the M&E systems has generally been supportive of Project planning and implementation and, as such, has been fulfilling the requirements in the Prodoc. This includes the recoding of success stories and good practices, which is not possible in projects that have been operating for a little over two years.
158. However, given there is no communications specialist in the PMO, the ability to support the development of informed decision-making using data and findings from the Project is likely to be challenging. Similarly, who is responsible for the annual systematisation of reports on project activities, lessons learned and good practices identified in key areas such as restoration of marine biodiversity, ecological monitoring, or on law enforcement in the MPA networks remains unclear.
159. Finally, the MTR team notes that the recording of project progress in the two sets of progress reports, one annual (PIR/GEF) the other six-monthly (PPR/FAO) requires the PMO staff to spend a lot of time filling out long templates on outputs and outcomes, but which are not linked to the ToC to inform stakeholders on what is working in terms of delivering transformational change and where there are gaps, or needs for more capacity development and/or resources. This is not aided by the absence of qualitative indicators that would support the application of, for example, Knowledge-Attitude-Practice (KAP) surveys, to support learning on where transformational change is taking place and where it is proving to be more difficult.

## 4.6 Cross-cutting priorities

### **MTR question 6 – *To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?***

**Finding 11:** The Prodoc makes no referenced to gender equality, nor in any of the three amendments of the EA in line with GEF/FAO guidelines. However, the Project is monitoring women's participation rates, which average 27 per cent to date, and is promoting activities directly targeting environmental education of school children to great effect.

**Finding 12:** The Project was identified before the ESS was launched and has not been the subject of review in the amendments to the EA. A cross-check of ESS criteria confirms there are two criteria that are not addressed: climate change and gender focus.

### 4.6.1 Gender and social inclusion focus

160. Neither the Prodoc, nor the third Amendment to the EA, provide any information on gender and social inclusion, although there is explicit mention of engaging youths in

educational outreach activities. This represents a major shortcoming for a GEF-funded project managed by FAO, especially as both institutions have comprehensive policies and guidelines on gender in recognition women and men exhibit distinct differences in their perspectives and priorities concerning environmental quality, access to ecological goods and services and their management. As a result, the Project's design has not been supported by a gender analysis.

**Table 6. Men, women and youth participation in training activities to 30/09/2022**

Type of training	No.	Male	Female	Youths (6-18 yrs)	% Women participation
<b>Training on co-management</b>					
Biodiversity Conservation - 11 MPAs	45	29	16	0	36%
Information Sharing - 6 MPAs YRE	25	15	10	0	40%
Cross-site visits to Jinlin GEF project	22	18	4	0	18%
Coord. & MPA Monitoring YRE	22	11	11	0	50%
Six specific studies*	26	12	14	0	54%
Scientific research in YRE MPAs	22	17	5	0	23%
Info. survey & exchange on CWD PRE	23	19	3	0	13%
Eco-comp. & restoration exchange PRE	15	12	4	0	20%
Coping with ecological threats - PRE	16	9	7	0	44%
Stakeholder coord. & networking PRE	17	12	5	0	29%
<b>Total</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Local community volunteers</b>					
Bio. conservation in Qi'ao Island (PRE)	31	4	27	0	87%
EPVG conservation in LBRCE-SMPA (YRE)	10	7	3	0	30%
EPVG conservation in GPNE-SMPA (YRE)	10	10	0	0	0
EPVG conservation in SSEN-SMPA (YRE)	10	10	0	0	0
EPVG conservation in LBFEN-SMPA (YRE)	10	10	0	0	0
EPVG conservation in YREEN-SMPA (YRE)	10	10	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Local community fisherman</b>					
Aquaculture course Guangrao County	61	54	7	0	11%
Aquaculture, quality & safety Dongying	106	79	27	0	25%
PA management, Guangli Fishing Port	45	40	5	0	9%
Volunteering in beach cleans/pub. welfare)	590	232	372	0	63%
<b>Total</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>TOTAL MALE/WOMEN PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>1,177</b>	<b>610</b>	<b>520</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Education &amp; awareness raising (Youths)</b>					
Science lectures for primary students	400	0	0	400	100%
Painting Competition	300	0	0	300	100%
Text & reference books (500 copies)	500	0	0	500	100%
<b>TOTAL YOUTH PARTICIPATION*</b>	<b>1,790</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>372</b>	<b>1,200</b>	<b>91%</b>

Source: PMO. \*Refers to minimum number of beneficiaries.

161. An assessment of the Project's own commitments to gender equality reveals that at the corporate level, where decisions are taken, (PSC, PEC, MPA Management teams), the level of women's participation is unsatisfactory. Presently, there are no women representatives in the PSC, or the PEC and only two of the MPA managers are women. However, reference to Table 5 below, indicates that at the community level, the gender balance in community-based training and activities averages close to **27 per cent**, which is moderately satisfactory. Moreover, an analysis of social inclusion in Table 6 shows the participation of at least 1,790 youths aged 6-18 years of age to 30/09/2022, is highly satisfactory, especially when considering the Project started its implementation only 27.5 months ago.

162. The MTR team cross-checked the level of satisfaction of women and children's participation in the Project's reports and in the field visits conducted in the PRE and YRE. (see Appendix 3). Overall, women and youths are satisfied with the training provided. Reference to 4.4.2, also identified women are satisfied with the training and education they have received and would like it be provided on a regular basis. This indicates a gender assessment and strategy is needed to: (i) identify the types of training modules women would like to enhance their empowerment in areas such as micro-enterprise development, eco-tourism services, community education and so forth; (ii) identify women who should be trained to participate in decision-making bodies at all levels of the Project; (iii) cross-check that all policies, strategies and plans supported by the Project have integrated gender and social inclusiveness objectives; (iv) ensure monitoring indicators are sex-disaggregated and track how many women are in decision-making roles.

163. Finally, the MTR team cross-checked whether there are ethnic minorities in the Project sites, but found there are none in the YRE, while in the PRE they are from the majority Han ethnic group in China, but speak either Cantonese or Mandarin dialects.

#### *4.6.2 Environmental and social standards*

164. The Prodoc was prepared prior to the launch of the Environmental and Social Screening (ESS) Checklist in 2016. The MTR team conducted a rapid assessment of the Project's activities against ESS criteria and found the following there is full compliance with all ESS11 to ESS-9 question, except the following:

- ESS-1 (Natural resources management): include measures that build resilience to climate change (also confirmed in sub-section 4.4.1);
- ESS 8 (Gender equality): Foster women's equal participation in institutions and decision-making processes (also highlighted in sub-section 4.6.1).

165. In the case of ESS-1 the MTR team has recommended this is criterion is addressed with the support of tools such as the new GIS system and amplifying its monitoring to report also on the Project's contribution in China to SDG 14, in particular Targets 14.2 and 14.A

and, in the light of COP27 report on the Aichi Targets, in particular Targets 11 and 15. For ESS-8 the MTR team has noted in the PMO's Self-assessment that it is committed to strengthening gender mainstreaming and monitoring by stating, '*The existing Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (Guidelines) will be updated, indicators to ensure active participation and benefits of female staff and beneficiaries will be formulated for measuring relevant outputs and monitoring results will be incorporated into PPR, PIR and relevant outputs and activity reports*'. (p. 83).

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

167. The famous Chinese proverb: *'when is the best time to plant a tree? and answer, 'Ten years ago'* can be applied to Project 045, when considering the Project was designed around 2010 and started implementation in 2020. However, this delay has not resulted in a lost opportunity. Indeed, Project 045 has climbed to a 48 per cent completion rate in just 27.5 months of implementation, while only spending around 30 per cent of GEF funds (includes pending payments). Completion of the RM in Appendix, also shows a large number of outputs have been delivered to a highly satisfactory, or satisfactory standard and these developments are already providing evidence the Project is on track to deliver positive outcomes. As a result, the MTR team's conclusion on the Project's **overall performance is satisfactory to 30/09/2022**. However, the current end date for operations is 03/02/2022, which means there is **not enough time to achieve the Project's objective** unless an extension is granted. A time extension is required, together with an update of the Project's design to iron out some gaps identified in the Prodoc.

168. The Project's **overall risk rating is "moderate"**. This rating is higher than the one in PIR-3 for several reasons. First, there is no proper assessment of risks. This demonstrated by the inclusion of the same mitigation measures provided in the Prodoc that date back to the design period of 2009-2010. Second, the production of GIS maps has so far not included the production of risk maps to highlight where biodiversity, habitats and human settlements are most vulnerable to threats identified by the Project in 2021. Third, important external factors persist that have to be managed, such as the implications of China's zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19 outbreaks within the Project's sites.

169. Conclusions on each of evaluation criteria reviewed in this report are provided in the following paragraphs:

170. **Conclusion 1 (Relevance) on question 1:** *Are the project outcomes and objective congruent with current country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries?* In spite of the ten-year delay between the design phase in 2010 and the start of implementation in 2020, Project 045's objective, and most of its outcomes and outputs have stood the test of time as they appear to align even closer with current priorities and needs of main stakeholders at all levels than when it was endorsed in 2013. Indeed, the MTR team argues this delay has been, in effect, a blessing in disguise, because the political and institutional climate has improved since the government reshuffle in 2018. In particular, it removed the fragmented nature of PA management by a plethora of institutions by creating the MNR and entrusting all-natural PA management to the NFGA. At the same time MEE was entrusted with monitoring and supervising PA management performance. In the wake of the reshuffle, President Xi called for the stepping up of

ecological civilisation in 2019. This has resulted in a number of new policy developments that support an increase in public investment in areas directly covered by Project 045, such as eco-compensation, restoration and conservation of MPAs and promoting education and research on biodiversity. This is especially the case in the YRE, where President Xi has supported the creation of a new National Park since 2020. In conclusion, these developments prepared the right conditions for Project 045 to set sail in calmer waters, as well as strengthened its alignment with GEF-4 Priorities BD-SP-2 (strengthening MPA management) and BD-SP-4 (developing the policy, planning and regulatory framework for MPAs), than would have been the case in 2013.

**171. Conclusion 2 (Effectiveness) on question 2:** *To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?* Project 045 has made very good progress in delivering a large number of outputs to 30/09/2022. This progress is already starting to deliver some positive outcomes in terms of establishing a more integrated and coherent policy, strategic and planning framework to guide the development, management and monitoring of the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE (Component 1); strengthening the capacity of MPA management teams in all 11 MPAs (confirmed in METT assessments) and which the MTR team confirms an increase in the total wetlands and seascapes area under improved management to 392,818 ha in 2022 against 387,320 ha in 2017 (Component 2); exceeding wetland and mangrove restoration targets by 5,791 ha and 10.01 ha respectively, with initial data suggesting some species are stabilising in numbers such as the Oriental white stork, the Chinese White Dolphin and native mangrove species in the PRE, (Component 2) and; meeting and exceeding targets in the Prodoc for number of volunteers and school children benefitting from educational outreach activities supporting marine biodiversity conservation. Notwithstanding these achievements, caveats are evident that need to be resolved if the Project is to fully meet its objective. The most important relate to an outdated design that has largely overlooked the importance of inter-institutional coordination and integration of important horizontal issues such as adaptive capacity, risk management and gender equality in all main activities, including the framework policies, strategies and plans supporting the development of the MPA networks. In addition, the issue of how outputs will be mainstreamed into governmental regulations, technical guidelines and standards is unclear, especially because it will depend on inter-institutional coordination within the MPA network. Coherent articulation of these documents in the MPA's own management plans is also unclear.

**172. Conclusion 3 (Efficiency) on question 3:** *To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?* The Project's estimated overall physical advance of 48 per cent has been achieved in just 27.5 months and using only 22.5 per cent of GEF funds to 30/09/2022 (30% if including pending payments). Moreover, this has been achieved during the zero-tolerance policy of the government to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The MTR team concludes the Project is demonstrating a highly satisfactory level of efficiency in converting its resources into results in a relatively short period of time.

This has been aided by leveraging far more in-kind co-finance (USD 35.9 m.) than was originally planned (USD 2.28 m.), thus demonstrating GEF-funded projects can leverage significant co-finance when they align strongly with China's priorities; namely the creation of a new National Park in the YRE. However, due to the delayed start of the Project's implementation in 2020 and a very short extension of the Project to 03/02/2023, there is insufficient time left for the Project to complete planned outputs and achieve its objective.

**173. Conclusion 4 (Sustainability) on question 4:** *What is the likelihood that the project results can be sustained after the end of the project?* There are positive signs that the Project's expected outcomes will be sustained in the YRE. Political and institutional support at all levels of government for the creation of a new National Park that will subsume five of the six MPAs supported by the Project. This means that it is highly likely that the management and network plans prepared for the MPA network will need to be adapted to support the management of the National Park covering a total land area of 351,799 ha, (34,025 ha. more than the current land area managed by the five MPAs), which will be managed by one authority. Moreover, the MTR team understands the budget for the National Park over five years will be in the order of CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion). However, the MTR team concludes the sustainability of the MPA network in the PRE remains challenging, because the coordination mechanisms in place do not have a multi-sector dimension to data monitoring and managing risks identified in the threat analysis and other studies conducted by Project 045, which is needed to develop informed and coordinated decision-making in areas such as law enforcement. In addition, insufficient attention has been given to developing adaptive management capacity to combat the climate emergency and on generating internal income streams to help boost the financial sustainability of the MPAs and their network.

**174. Conclusion 5 (factors affecting performance) on question 5:** *What are the main factors affecting the project from reaching its results?* Three main factors are affecting the Project's performance. First, the project's logical framework (Results Matrix), has an outdated causal logic that is in urgent need of updating to improve the way it tracks outcomes (results), manages risk and supports learning. Second, FAO-CN is not providing any technical oversight to GEF-funded projects in China, which the MTR team concludes reduces its added value and visibility in China. In addition, there is no CTA, which places a high level of dependency on the LTO. Moreover, the LTO is unable to visit Project 045 due to the zero-tolerance policy COVID-19 that is still in place in China. Third, the PMO lacks human resources in key areas and would benefit from more support and training from the PEC and FAO-RAP in some key areas, such as developing synergies with other GEF-funded projects in China, or on knowledge management. Most important is the absence of a Chief Technical Adviser to act as the main linchpin between the PMO and its main partners, (the PEC, the MPA managers, provincial and municipal governments and FAO/other UN agencies engaged in protected area management). The PMO also does not have a M&E expert to support informed decision-making, knowledge management and communications.

**175. Conclusion 6 (Cross-cutting priorities) on question 6:** *To what extent have gender consideration been taken into account in project design and implementation?* The Prodoc and EA amendments provide no guidance on applying gender equality and the ESS checklist was not applied, because the Project was designed before it was launched. However, the PMO has taken its own steps to monitor participation of women and youths in its community-based activities and environmental education outreach exercises, which in the case of the latter confirm the Project has already exceed its target. In conclusion, the Project lacks a gender specialist dedicated to mainstreaming gender in all main activities to raise awareness on why women’s equal access to, and control over, environmental resources and the goods and services that they provide in the MPAs networks is important to sustaining co-management, ecological and social networks and to up-scaling good practices.

## 5.2. Recommendations

**176. Recommendation 1 (linked to Conclusions 2, 3 and 5) for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP and FAO-CN, PSC and PMO:** the Project should be extended to 03 June 2025 in order to complete 60 months of effective implementation since the inception workshop held on 12 June 2020. This extension should be granted on the condition an interactive workshop is conducted to:

- 1) Prepare the ToC for Project 045, paying particular attention to establishing clearer and more coherent results (immediate and wider outcomes) that reflect the current political and institutional context, in particular the creation of the new YRE National Park that will absorb five of the six MPAs;
- 2) Update and clarify the Project’s RM, paying particular attention to:
  - (i) improving the causal logic between the Project’s outcomes selected above and their corresponding outputs;
  - (ii) ensuring all outputs are updated to reflect the current institutional context and needs of stakeholders and end beneficiaries;
  - (iii) integrating gender equality and risk management as cross-cutting themes in all main outputs and outcomes to deliver greater inclusiveness and resilience.
- 3) Revise the budget allocations to the Project’s main components following a review of the proposed reassignment of some of the outputs to a different component (see Appendix 6), or which are agreed should be added to respond to gaps in the Prodoc (see Recommendation 4) and which are considered important to support the Project achieve its objective and goal.

### **Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) Fine tune and adopt the ToC proposed in Appendix 9 with the aim of enabling all participants to agree on the Project’s vision and mission both inside the extension period and to Agenda 2030.

- b) Formulate the RM using the ToC, the outcomes defined in Chapter 3 and the RM applied by the MTR team in Appendix 6 as guides. It is strongly recommended:
- one immediate outcome is identified for each component 1-4 by 2025, one wider outcome expected over time (between 2025 and 2030);
  - outputs that are no longer relevant are removed and new outputs assigned where there are gaps/threats that may affect the achievement of outcomes and the Project's objective;
  - GEF and FAO Guidelines on gender and ask FAO-CN are consulted and FAO provides examples of good practice from other GEF-funded Projects on integrating risk management in their planning, implementation and monitoring. This should then be cross-checked with the assumptions and risks from the ToC and the threats analysis of Project 045;
  - ensure the RM has separate columns for "indicators", "baselines" and "targets";
  - revise the indicators into quantitative indicators that are Specific Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Time bound (SMART) and, where relevant, qualitative indicators that can only be measured through surveys and which applies the Subjective, Participatory, Interpreted, Cross-checked, Empowering, Disaggregated approach (SPICED). This is particularly important to measure transformational change through, for example, Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices surveys (KAP);
  - Establish realistic targets that can be attained by 2025. Targets relating to SPICED indicators should be identified after consultation with stakeholders and beneficiaries.
- c) A review is conducted to determine how far existing funds could be relocated to priority actions. The MTR team suggests the following five priority areas should be considered:
- Supporting the development of a set of management plans (on infrastructure, ecological monitoring, education, etc.) development for the YRE National Park in which it can share the lessons learned and good practices identified from the last two years on developing the YRE MPA network;
  - Establishing a Task Force/Think Tank to determine how to develop cross-sector coordination and cooperation to support the development of effective co-management, ecological, social and law enforcement networks in the PRE;
  - Exploring formal synergies where information, collaboration and funding could be shared with GEF-funded project managed by FAO and UNDP via a memorandum of understanding (MoU) agreeing to, for example, collaboration in the form of in-kind co-funding arrangements, and/or *ad hoc* arrangements. For example, in the case of the MoU foreseen with the GEF6-funded project 'Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity', it should include provisions to share funding in areas of mutual interest and clarify Project 045's communication channels with the wider umbrella programme on 'Protected Area System Reform';

- piloting multi-agency monitoring of ecological and socio-economic data to promote ecological civilisation (at all levels) on the causes and effects of human activity on estuarine ecosystems, develop informed decision-making and improve reporting on national and international targets and goals;
- conducting a biodiversity conservation gap analysis in the PRE concerning the conservation of the Chinese White Dolphin and recommendations provided on the co-management areas and approach to be adopted (such as other effective area-based conservation areas (OECMs)).

**177. Recommendation 2 (linked to conclusions 2 and 4) for FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, the PMO and the PSC:** The Project should train the MPA management teams to integrate the following framework plans, regulations and actions into their management plans (Output 2.2): the eco-compensation plan (Output 1.1); MPA network regulations (Output 1.3); integrated management and networking plans (Output 1.4); restoration strategies (Output 1.5); long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans (Output 1.6) investment strategies (Output 3.1). In addition, the Project should identify two framework plans that are currently missing on: capacity development (to develop and maintain co-management, ecological and social networks) and law enforcement (to develop a multi-sector mechanism to control illegal or bad practices with the support of local communities).

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) Using the template in the 2002 Guidelines, "Outline of Management Plans for National Nature Reserves"<sup>26</sup> (includes Marine Nature Reserves), training should focus on preparing the management plans for each MPA in the PRE (and potentially in the YRE National Park) as follows:
  - Restoration planning (link to Outputs 1.1 and 1.5);
  - Research and monitoring planning (link to Output 1.6);
  - Rational development and use of resources plan (link to Output 3.1).
  - Community work mission planning (link to outputs 4.1 and 4.5);
- b) Using the template in the 2008 "Technical Guidelines for functional zonation and management plan compilation" (includes Special Marine Protected Areas), training should focus on preparing the management plan for the GPNSMPA as follows:
  - Scientific research and monitoring planning (link to Output 1.6); e
  - Eco-restoration planning (Outputs 1.1 and 1.5);
  - Publicity and education planning (link to Outputs 4.5 and 4.6);
  - Community co-management (link to Outputs 1.4 and 4.2);
  - Eco-industry development planning (link to Output 3.1).
- c) In line with Recommendation 1 (point b, sub-point (ii) on new outputs), it is suggested two further framework plans are prepared to support each MPA in the PRE and the YRE

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<sup>26</sup> The MTR team found this template in the report for the North-East Asia MPA Network (2021), p.16, provided by the PEC/PMO.

National Park and GPNSMPA complete their corresponding templates in the following two areas:

- Training needs assessment and capacity development plan. This is justified on the grounds the MPA management teams still need more capacity building according to the latest METT assessments in 2021 to implement MPA plans that support the establishment of co-management, ecological and social networks;
- Patrolling/law enforcement framework plan. This is justified, because there is a need for MPA management teams to work more closely with the municipal law enforcement teams and some key sectors on controlling pollution, illegal fishing and marine transport lanes, among others.

**178. Recommendation 3 (linked to Conclusions 3 and 5) for FAO-GEF Coordination Unit (GCU), FAO-RAP, FAO-CN:** FAO stakeholders should conduct an online workshop to identify consensus on three issues. First, identify and agree on the role FAO-CN should play in supporting technical oversight of the GEF project portfolio in China. Second, agree on a long-term training plan of FAO stakeholders to strengthen their administrative, technical and coordination/strategic decision-making roles and responsibilities. Third, review the current funding arrangements applied to manage the GEF project portfolio at the country office level. The main goal of this review should be to determine how FAO increase its added value in GEF-funded projects, as well as enhance its visibility both nationally and internationally.

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on technical oversight:**

- a) FAO-CN, FAO-RAP and FAO-R should conduct a preliminary meeting in December 2022 to agree on the date and agenda of the online workshop in early 2023.
- b) It is recommended that the agenda discusses the possible options for enhancing FAO-CN's technical oversight of the GEF project portfolio. For example, the MTR team recommends either a technical adviser is recruited full-time (preferred option), or one or more existing staff members in FAO-CN is/are trained, to act as the main filter between the PMOs of GEF-funded projects and the LTO.
- c) Key roles and responsibilities of the technical adviser(s) recruited/trained should be, on the one hand, to provide general technical oversight functions. On the other, to stimulate formal synergies and partnerships between GEF projects in areas of mutual interest. These include information and data exchange, joint training sessions, sharing of lessons learned and good practices, technical and administrative exchanges and coordination of international and national training events, publications and conferences.
- d) It is strongly recommended the technical adviser(s) recruited/trained is/are able to provide technical support in five key areas (in line with GEF/FAO Priorities):
  - On biodiversity/habitat restoration, conservation and sustainable use;
  - On adaptive management to ensure risk management is fully integrated into restoration, conservation and sustainable use methods and practices to build resilient ecosystems and communities;

- On gender equality, (preferably through joint training with men) to enhance awareness and understanding on how the empowerment of women and youths is crucial to sustaining restoration, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources in China;
- On identifying with the PMOs areas where staff need support, guidance and training, especially in areas such as knowledge management, the development of joint training exercises and publications with other GEF-funded projects in areas of mutual interest, monitoring of key criteria in the ESS Checklist (to support reporting on the reduction of biodiversity loss, restoration of habitats, and contributions to the 2030 Agenda);
- On latest thinking and initiatives of the UN system in general and FAO in particular after international events, such as COP24 (for climate change) recently completed in November 2022 and COP15 (for biodiversity), which is currently taking place in December 2022;
- On applying GEF/FAO priorities and guidelines on gender.

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on the staff training:**

- a) It is recommended that the long-term training plan has as its main objective to seek maximum institutional complementarity between FAO stakeholders. A key element should, therefore, focus on strengthening the linkages between the administrative, technical and coordination/strategic decision-making roles and responsibilities of FAO-CN, FAO-RAP and FAO-R.
- b) To support the application of the long-term training plan, FAO stakeholders should develop a communications platform that supports two areas of staff development. First, the exchange of information and data to capture the strengths and weaknesses of project design, performance and impact. The MTR team considers this is crucial to stimulating informed dialogue and decision-making on optimising the transformative potential of GEF-funded projects. For example, the MTR team observed in Project 045 (and in other GEF-funded projects such as 052, 056 and 057) that mitigation is largely overlooked as a co-benefit of adaptation, especially where restoration of habitats and biodiversity are applying nature-based solutions. Second, monitoring of the training plan's effectiveness to support and guide the updating of the training plan on an annual or bi-annual basis. For example, the MTR team discovered Project 045 (and other GEF-funded projects in China) generate a lot of explicit and implicit knowledge through, for example, its restoration activities, or engagement of progressive entrepreneurs from the private sector. In both cases new skills appear to be developing that may explain why Project 045 has achieved high levels of productivity and cost-effectiveness, especially in some of the MPAs visited (for example, QDIPNR in PRE and YRDNNR in YRE). However, this is not being captured effectively through, for example KAP surveys, to support the development of knowledge management in FAO-CN.
- c) It is strongly recommended that the training plan covers the period 2023-2030 so that it can also be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. In this way FAO can also use the

training plan and its communications platform to promote its work in China and enhance its visibility among key national stakeholders, including MNR, MEE and MARN.

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation on funding:**

- a) In the light of the recently conducted GEF Fee review, it is recommended an independent review is conducted to identify how the allocated GEF administration fee should be optimised to enhance the added-value of FAO's support at the country office level. The main aim of the review should, therefore, focus on identifying a sustainable funding plan that supports the country office apply both administrative and technical oversight of the GEF portfolio, as well as the long-term training plan recommended above.
- b) It is recommended the study includes case studies of at least three country offices, one of which should be FAO-CN.
- c) The review should not only look at funding needs, but also where greater efficiency could be achieved at the country, regional and central levels of FAO.
- d) It is recommended the funding plan proposed covers the same period as the abovementioned training plan (2023-2030) to ensure there are no gaps in funding of the training programme.
- e) It is recommended this independent review is conducted as soon as possible in 2023 after agreement has been reached on how to strengthening the technical oversight functions of country offices such as FAO-CN.

**179. Recommendation 4 (linked to conclusions 5 and 6) for the FAO-R, FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, PSC and PMO:** In the event Recommendation 1 is accepted and the Project is extended, the PSC should consider authorising the PMO to recruit a Chief Technical Adviser, a Monitoring and Evaluation specialist and a Gender specialist. It is recommended all three are recruited on a part-time basis and in accordance with the PSC's views on the Project's needs and resources available. The MTR team suggests the CTA is recruited on a flexible sub-contracting arrangement that covers at least 150 work/days per annum in order he/she has enough time to support some key areas that need strengthening such as stimulating cross-sector cooperation in the PRE MPA network, addressing the output gaps mentioned under Recommendation 2 (and Recommendation 5 below), improving communication channels and knowledge management with FAO-CN and FAO-RAP, as well as other UN agencies such as UNDP in China in line with Recommendation 4.

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) If possible, the recruitment of the CTA should be fast-tracked in order he/she participates in the workshop proposed in Recommendation 1. The MTR team suggests the CTA is an international expert who has in-depth work experience in the management of marine ecosystems (preferably including estuarine MPAs). However, in the event the

- zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19 persists into 2023, the recruitment of a Chinese expert for the CTA position with similar experience should be prioritised;
- b) The TOR of the CTA should focus on supporting the PMO and main stakeholder address the priority areas of support selected in the abovementioned workshop. This should, preferably, be on supporting the shift within Project 045 to supporting the development of co-management, ecological and social networks within the YRE National Park and the MPA network in the PRE. In addition, the CTA should have good communication skills to support and guide the setting up of the Task Force/Think Tank proposed in Recommendation 1 and implement its recommendations on the establishment of cross-sector coordination mechanisms in the PRE;
  - c) The recruitment of the M&E specialist should have in-depth knowledge and experience on monitoring of ecological and socio-economic data and its evaluation, as well as the capture of explicit and implicit knowledge, to support decision-makers (from different sectors at the Provincial and municipal government levels) take informed decisions on developing and improving co-management, ecological, social and law enforcement networks in the PRE and YRE National Park;
  - d) The M&E specialist should also be able to systematise his/her work to support the PMO promote its ecological civilisation activities, especially under components 2 and 4;
  - e) The gender specialist should have in-depth knowledge on developing a gender strategy dedicated to integrating gender equality into policies, strategies and plans, in regulations and guidelines and in training and educational activities, among others. In all cases this should be performed in accordance with GEF and FAO priorities;
  - f) The gender specialist should have systematisation skills to support the PMO produce, publish and increase the visibility of the Project's knowledge products, including success stories and good practices.

**180. Recommendation 5 (linked to conclusions 2 and 4) for FAO-RAP, FAO-CN, the PMO and the PSC:** The GIS database should be expanded to develop risk maps that show marine habitats and biodiversity that are most vulnerable to climate variability and change, natural disasters and degradation due to socio-economic activity in the PRE MPA network and the YRE National Park.

**Suggestions on how to apply the recommendation:**

- a) DeepNature should be requested to support the development of a pilot set of these risk maps using existing images and data as far as possible and supported by ground truthing where necessary with the participation of the local volunteer groups;
- b) It is recommended risk maps pay particular attention to weather/climate-induced events, in particular: typhoons causing sea surges and floods, sea-level rise, and droughts;
- c) DeepNature should develop a training course to demonstrate how these maps are produced and can be used to support informed decision-making on integrating risk management in the Project's main activities, in line with Recommendation 1 (point b)

and Recommendation 4 (point c). For example, its application in restoration strategies should demonstrate how restoration activities help increase resilience.

- d) The PMO staff should assess how the risk maps could be used in the education outreach activities to develop awareness and action on enhancing public safety and learning on how restoration of wetlands, mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs enhance resilience of the ecosystem and people;
- e) The PMO should assess, whether the risk maps could also stimulate restoration actions that store carbon and offer opportunities for carbon offset trading, which has already been developed by Project 056 in Fujian Province.
- f) The PMO should determine whether there are funds to develop an early warning phone app that can also be used to, for example, support bird and dolphin monitoring.

## 6. Lessons learned

181. The MTR team identified the following lessons and good practices that can be used to support the development of knowledge products and management by the PMO in particular and FAO in general.
182. **Lesson 1 – on working with the private sector:** there is evidence local companies have an interest to invest in their local communities and that through this process a lot of implicit knowledge and new skills are generated, but which are not captured.
183. **Lesson 2 – on environmental education in schools:** intellectual products and materials, environmental education text and reference books and other knowledge products should be reviewed by teachers, experts and children together, so that they can be tailored to the needs of different age groups of school children;
184. **Lesson 3 – on applying biodiversity monitoring:** data should be collected from an appropriate number of monitoring stations to ensure data are reliable.
185. **Lesson 4 – on biodiversity conservation:** The restoration of up to eleven different varieties of native mangroves in the PRE is good practice as different mangrove species have different symbiotic relationships with marine biodiversity;
186. **Lesson 5 – sustaining wetland conservation:** the restoration of fish ponds at different depths is good practice, because different wetland bird species feed at different depths.
187. **Lesson 6 – on law enforcement:** bringing different stakeholders together who have different law enforcement task and duties in MPA network jurisdictions is good practice as it builds up a sense of unity and ownership that is crucial to applying effective and efficient law enforcement in which local people are encouraged to become the guardians of marine biodiversity.

## 7. Appendices

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## **Appendix 1. Terms of reference for the MTR**

**Terms of reference for the mid-term review  
of “*Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity  
Conservation, Restoration and Protected  
Area Networking in China*”  
GCP/CPR/045/GFF  
GEF ID: 4175**

**FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

**July 2022**

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

BD-SO	Biodiversity – Strategic Objective (GEF)
BD-SP	Biodiversity – Strategic Program (GEF)
BH	Budget holder
CO	Country Office
EOI	Expression of interest
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FLO	Funding liaison officer
FPMIS	Field Project Management Information System
GCU	FAO GEF Coordination Unit
IETCEC	International Economic and Technical Cooperation and Exchange Centre
LDCF	Least Developed Countries Fund
LPSC	Local Project Steering Committee
LTO	Lead technical officer
LTU	Lead technical unit
MPA	Marine Protected Areas
MTR	Mid-term review
NFGA	National Forestry and Grassland Administration
NPD	National Project Director
PMU	Project management unit
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PTF	Project Task Force
RM	Mid-term review manager
RO	Regional Office
SCCF	Special Climate Change Fund
SO	FAO Strategic Objective
SRO	Sub-regional Office

## Introduction

This document provides the terms of reference for the mid-term review (MTR) of the FAO-GEF project “Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China”.

## Project/programme background and context

1. The FAO-GEF project “Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China” was endorsed by the GEF CEO on 22 February 2013. The GCP Agreement Letter and Execution Agreement were signed on 4 August 2016 and 12 June 2017, respectively. Its official starting date is 12 June 2017, and its closing date is 3 February 2023. The Inception Workshop was held online on 23 June 2020. (Please refer to Section 1.4 for details)The operational partner is the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA). The Project Management Office is set up in the First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resource. The project has a GEF budget of 3,516,400 USD and 11,845,080 USD co-financing.
2. China has more than 1,500 rivers with significant basin drainage areas (over 1,000 square kilometers) that flow into sea, leading to formation of discrete estuarine ecosystems. Protection of environment and conservation of biodiversity now feature prominently in China’s national priorities as the country has made significant strides in reduction of poverty and is steadily moving to catching up with economic standards of the western world. Conservation of estuarine wetland systems is expected to generate new knowledge and experiences that can be scaled up and replicated in other estuaries in both China and the region. The project objective is to improve the existing efforts to conserve biodiversity in China’s major estuarine ecosystems.

### 1.1 Description of the project, project objectives and components

3. Box 1: Basic information

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|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>A. Project Title: Demonstration of Estuarine Biodiversity Conservation, Restoration and Protected Area Networking in China</li><li>B. GEF Project ID Number: 4175</li><li>C. Recipient country: China</li><li>D. GEF Agency: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)</li><li>E. Executing Agency: NFGA</li><li>F. GEF Focal Area: Biodiversity</li><li>G. GEF Objectives: BD-SP 2 (Increasing Representation of Effectively Managed Marine Protected Areas in Protected Area Systems); BD-SP 4 (Strengthening the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity)</li><li>H. FAO Strategy/operational program: SO E (Sustainable Management of Forests and Trees); SO F (Sustainable Management and Utilization of Natural Resources, including Land, Water, Air, Climate and Genetic Resources, for the Benefit of Present and Future Generations)</li><li>I. Date of CEO endorsement: 22 February 2013</li><li>J. Date of project start (EOD): 12 June 2017</li><li>K. Operational Partners Agreement signed: 12 June 2017</li><li>L. Execution Agreement amended: 12 April 2021</li></ol> |
|--|

M. Initial date of project completion (original NTE): 12 June 2021
N. Project Duration: Six years
O. Date of Mid-Term Evaluation: September 2022

#### 4. Context

China has more than 1,500 rivers with significant basin drainage areas (> 1,000 km<sup>2</sup>) that run into the sea. All have formed discrete estuarine ecosystems, three of which are defined as large (i.e., greater than 450 thousand km<sup>2</sup> in area). Despite the significance of these highly productive and biologically rich systems the recent rapid growth in residential, commercial and industrial sectors in coastal areas and associated maritime transport centers particularly in the larger estuaries, have adversely affected most of China's major deltas.

5. In contrast to the country's terrestrial ecosystems, the collective response to the threats in China's estuarine ecosystems is still nascent in its development and faces a number of constraints. These include: (i) policy failures and gaps contributing to the loss and degradation of estuarine ecosystems; (ii) lack of inclusion of biodiversity conservation criteria in local, regional and national socio-economic development plans; (iii) an absence of effective inter-institutional coordination mechanisms needed to address the threats to these highly complex ecosystems at both national and local levels; (iv) monitoring mandates and efforts disbursed across a number of institutions with low levels of collaboration and sharing of data that constrain obtaining an accurate understanding of the "health" of these ecosystems; (v) low capacity to manage estuarine and marine protected areas (MPA) and use the existing MPAs more effectively as tools to conserve biodiversity of global significance; and (vi) lack of awareness and recognition of the significance of estuarine biodiversity by decision and policy makers and the public at large.
6. In China, The Yellow (*Huanghe*) and Pearl (*Zhujiang*) Rivers have contributed to the formation of two of China's three largest deltas<sup>27</sup>. The Yellow River Estuary (YRE) is China's second longest river and runs into the Yellow (*Bohai*) Sea (Map 2). The Estuary is one of the largest in the world and measures approximately 100 km by 100 km (at its widest points) with an estimated area of 5,450 km<sup>2</sup> and a coastline of 589 km (drainage area is an estimated 795,000 km<sup>2</sup>). It is thought to be the most extensive, youngest and fastest growing estuarine wetland in the world increasing in area on average by 23 km<sup>2</sup> annually. This temperate estuarine ecosystem supports a wide range of habitats ranging from beaches, reeds, *Spartina* grass and sand and mudflats. The Estuary not only represents one of China's main spawning and feeding grounds but is also considered to be of international importance in providing critical habitat for some 265 species of migratory birds accounting for 22.3 % of all species reported for China, many of them of regional and international significance. As in most estuaries, there is a rich biodiversity that includes 608 species of higher plants, 922 invertebrates and 325 vertebrates of which 25 are mammals. In total, there is one species of plant and 68 species of animals dependent on the estuarine ecosystem that are classified as category I or II species.<sup>28</sup> The project areas have been selected as follows:

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<sup>27</sup> The third is the Yangtze River delta.

<sup>28</sup> National endangered species in China are categorized into the following classes: (i) critically endangered (I), (ii) endangered (II) and (iii) vulnerable (III).

- i. Project Site #1: The Yellow River Estuary, Dongying City, Shandong Province
- ii. Project Site #2: The Pearl River Estuary, Guangdong Province

7. Threats to China's estuaries include:

**Reduction of freshwater inflows** due to upstream diversions and impoundments;

**Pollution loading** associated with local and offsite industrialization and urbanization;

**Non-sustainable use of natural resources** (e.g., fishery resources);

**Habitat loss** due primarily to urban and industrial expansion.

8. Project components and beneficiaries

The Project has **five components**: (i) Policy, Planning and Institutional Arrangements; (ii) MPA Networking and Wetland Restoration; (iii) Threat Analysis, Mitigation and Monitoring; (iv) Capacity Building and Increasing Environmental Education and Public Awareness; and (v) Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Replication of Project Results.

9. The Project's specific objective is to mainstream the conservation of estuarine biodiversity in economic sector development plans and develop a series of "best practices" based on experiences derived from project supported field activities focusing on the creation of protected area networks and wetland conservation and restoration in the Yellow and Pearl River Estuaries.

The project design is based on the following national priorities and plans in support of biodiversity conservation in the country's coastal estuarine ecosystems:

- China's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2011-2030)
- National Wetland Conservation Program (2002-2030)
- National Marine Economy Development Plan
- strategies and policies to promote ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow and Pearl River Estuaries

10. To achieve the project objectives and expected outcomes the Project has been structured in 5 components and various sub-components as presented in the box below.

**Box 2: Components and sub-components of the project**

**Component 1: Policy, Planning and Institutional Arrangements**

1.1 Policy

1.2 Planning

1.3 Institutional Arrangements

**Component 2: MPA Networking and Wetland Restoration**

- 2.1 Strengthening of Individual MPAs
- 2.2 MPA Networking
- 2.3 Wetland Restoration

**Component 3: Threat Analysis, Mitigation and Monitoring**

- 3.1 Threat Analysis and Mitigation
- 3.2 Monitoring

**Component 4: Capacity Building and Increasing Environmental Education and Public Awareness**

- 4.1 Capacity Building
- 4.2 Increasing Environmental Education and Public Awareness

**Component 5: Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Replication of Project Results**

- 5.1 Project Management
- 5.2 Monitoring & Evaluation
- 5.3 Replication of Results

11. The main beneficiaries of the Project are:

The **NFGA and local estuarine and MPA management authorities** in the project sites will benefit from capacity building, access to international experience and cross-sector cooperation with other government partners.

The **local communities** will have increased employment and income-generating opportunities, will have higher awareness and understanding of sustainable water management and utilization, and will enjoy a better natural environment.

**Broader estuarine and MPA management practitioners and agencies** will benefit from the lessons, experience and information built up at the project sites under through knowledge sharing and exchange.

12. The co-financing

The total co-financing committed in the Project Document is 11 845 080 USD, including: (i) State Government (USD 698 604); (ii) Province of Guangdong (USD 6 772 135); (iii) Province of Shandong (USD 4 142 127); (iv) FAO (USD 232 214). FAO, as the GEF Agency, is only responsible for the administration of the GEF resources and the FAO co-financing.

<b>FINANCING PLAN: GEF/LDCF/SCCF ALLOCATION:</b>	<b>USD 3 516 400</b>
<u>Co-financing:</u>	
State Government (in-kind and cash)	USD 698 604
Province of Guangdong (in-kind and cash)	USD 6 772 135
Province of Shandong (in-kind and cash)	USD 4 142 127
FAO (in-kind and cash)	USD 232 214

<b>Total Co-financing:</b>	<b>USD 11 845 080</b>
<b>Total Budget:</b>	<b>USD 15 361 480</b>

### The co-financing materialized until 30 June 2022

Sources of Co-financing <sup>29</sup>	Name of Co-financer	Type of Co-financing	Amount Confirmed at CEO endorsement / approval	Actual Amount Materialized at 30 June 2022
National Government	NFGA	Cash	50,300	15,707
National Government	NFGA	In-kind	648,304	/
Local Government	Guangdong Government	Cash	6,025,100	802,610
Local Government	Guangdong Government	In-kind	747,035	
Local Government	Shandong Government	Cash	33,526,00	47,120
Local Government	Shandong Government	In-kind	789,527	789,527
Private Sector	DeepNature Technology Co., Ltd	Cash	0	47,120
FAO Agency	FAO	Cash	139,300	/
FAO Agency	FAO	In-kind	92,914	96,625
		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11,845,080</b>	<b>1,798,709</b>

<sup>29</sup> Sources of Co-financing may include: Bilateral Aid Agency(ies), Foundation, GEF Agency, Local Government, National Government, Civil Society Organization, Other Multi-lateral Agency(ies), Private Sector, Beneficiaries, Other.



## 1.2 Project stakeholders and their role

**Table A4.1. Stakeholder analysis matrix**

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) <sup>30</sup>	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) <sup>31</sup>	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
<b>1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project, e.g. FAO, executing partners</b>				
FAO	GEF agency	Manage and disburse funds from GEF in accordance with the rules and procedures of FAO; Oversee project implementation in accordance with the project document; Provide technical guidance; Report to the GEF Secretariat and Evaluation Office through the annual Project Implementation Review on project progress and provide financial reports to the GEF Trustee.	1	Interviewees: Carlos Watson, FAOR and BH; Zhao Wei, GEF Portfolio Officer; Li He, LTO based in RAP; Yurie Naito: FLO based in HQ.
NFGA	After the government reshuffle in 2018, NFGA became the new execution partner of the project in 2019. The NFGA is the national level body responsible for forest and grassland management in China, as well as the management of national parks and protected areas.	Supervise the project implementation.	1	PMO will provide the list of participants in the beginning of the evaluation
FIO	FIO has been involved in the project from the designing stage. The PMO is set up in FIO.	Directly responsible for technical implementation of project activities, day-to-day monitoring as well as financial management and purchase of goods, minor works, and services (procurement). It closely coordinates with other national partners on different levels.		Interviews with Zhang Zhaohui, CTA; Cong Bailin, the Project Manager; Wang Qian, the Project Assistant; etc.
National consultants and service providers	Provide technical support to the PMO	Responsible for certain project activities and contribute to project outcomes	1	PMO will provide the list of participants in the beginning of the evaluation
<b>2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project, e.g. members of the PSC</b>				
Ministry of Finance	GEF Focal Point in China	Overall planning and supervision of all GEF projects in China.	2	MTR team is encouraged to consult with MoF during the review process if GEF OFP is available.

<sup>30</sup> Include the names of relevant individuals, if known, and be as specific as possible

<sup>31</sup> 1 = essential; 2 = desirable; 3 = if time and resources allow

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) <sup>30</sup>	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) <sup>31</sup>	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
Dongying Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries in Shandong and the Bureau of Ocean and Fisheries in Guangdong	Local partners	They are the lead actors in implementing the project activities in the field.	1	Tele interviews; Meetings will be organized during the field visits of the national consultant.
County/District level government	Local partners	County level (in Guangdong) and District level (in Dongying) governments play a crucial role in implementing the on-the-ground pilot activities along the two pilot estuaries.	2	Meetings will be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.
<b>3. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)</b>				
Department of International Cooperation	Local partners	The focal point for all formal exchanges and collaboration with international agencies	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.
Policy and Planning Department	Local partners	The key stakeholder for the provision of advice on policy formulation and national plans within the remit of the Agency	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.
Department of Marine Environmental Protection	Local partners	Responsible for the coordination of marine environmental protection affairs, development of the marine environmental monitoring and assessment sub-component, design of the marine ecological compensation policy activity, oversight for the marine biodiversity and marine ecological environmental conservation, management of the marine nature reserves and Special MPAs, and organizing marine monitoring network.	2	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.
3rd Institute of Oceanography	Local partners	Its role is to provide science and technological support on biodiversity conservation, restoration and PA networking; provide technical opinions and guidance to the project; provide advice on biodiversity assessment and field surveys; and provide training in participatory protected area management, community involvement and environmental and ecosystem monitoring.	2	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.
Coastal Ecosystem and Environmental Research Laboratory	Local partners	To provide scientific and technological support on biodiversity conservation, restoration and PA networking, periodic advice to and evaluation of the Project, and	3	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the

Key stakeholders (disaggregated as appropriate) <sup>30</sup>	What is their role in the project?	What is the reason for their inclusion in or exclusion from the MTR?	Priority for MTR (1-3) <sup>31</sup>	How and when should they be involved in the MTR?
		support each of the project's two Local Project Steering Committee (LPSC)		national consultant.
<b>4. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)</b>				
Local communities	beneficiaries	Mainstreaming biodiversity into PA network must include a social component since people will do this mainstreaming work and knowledge and local knowledge will be critical to its success.	1	Meetings might be organized during the field visit of the national consultant.

13. This initial list of key stakeholders is important to help identify potential groups and individuals to be consulted and interviewed as part of the MTR process. The initial list is likely to be modified by MTR team members once they become engaged in the MTR and will be updated as part of the MTR inception report.

### 1.3 Theory of change

14. The project document did not propose any Theory of Change, but has a detailed results matrix. The Theory of Change will be reconstructed by the MTR team during the inception or main phase. The reconstructed ToC will be included in the MTR report.

### 1.4 Implementation progress and main challenges to date

15. The project was endorsed by the GEF CEO in February 2013. Since it is one of the first FAO GEF projects following OPIM, the drafting of the Execution Agreement (EA) took a long time, which was finally signed between FAO and State Ocean Administration (SOA) in June 2017, but the project implementation did not start immediately because the lead department of SoA changed for two times. FAO transferred the first instalment of GEF grant of USD 175,820 to FIO in May 2018. After the government reshuffle in 2018, SOA did not exist anymore. As the GEF focal point, MoF coordinated with NFGA and NFGA agreed to be the new execution partner in August 2019. The Project Inception Workshop was held in June 2020. Because FIO is not under the direct supervision of NFGA, FAO could not transfer the 2<sup>nd</sup> instalment of USD 811,683 to FIO until May 2021, after the EA was amended for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in April 2021, mainly to extend the project duration and to update the Workplan with budget.
16. Authorized by NFGA, a National Project Management Office has been established in FIO.

**The Project Management Office** has 8 members:

Mr Cong Bailin, Associated Professor of the First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources FIO, is the Project Manager.

Ms Deng Aifang, Research Associate of the FIO, is the Project Assistant.

Mr Yu Jia, Engineer of the Division of Asset Management of the FIO, is responsible for procurement and finance of the Project.

Ms Wang Qian is the Project Translator.

Ms Lin Jing is the Project Clerk.

Ms Jiao Xueying, intern of the Project, is responsible for activity organizing.

Ms Gao Xiuyu, intern of the Project, is responsible for the operation of WeChat official account.

Mr Wei Bingyang, intern of the Project, is responsible for making film and videos.

The PSC is the supervision and decision-making structure of the project.

**The Project Steering Committee (PSC)** was established with 9 members:

Mr Yan Chengao, Deputy Director of the Department of Natural Reserve Management, National Forestry and Grassland Administration, is the Director of the PSC.

Mr Wang Zongling, Vice-president of the FIO, is the Vice-director of the PSC.

Ms Liu Jingying is the Level III Investigator, Department of International Financial Cooperation, Ministry of Finance.

Vincent Martin is the Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (Now is Carlos Watson)

Ms Yuan Xiaohong is the Director of the Department of Protected Natural Area Management, National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Mr Xie Chunhua is the Director of the Department of International Cooperation, National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

Mr Yang Yafeng is the Director of the International Cooperation of FIO. (Now is Ms Li Li)

Mr Li Chengjin is the Level II Investigator, Department of the Natural Resources of Shandong Province.

Mr Wu Xiaomou is the Deputy Director of the Forestry Administration of Guangdong Province.

PEC provides technical support to the project implementation.

**The Project Expert Committee (PEC)** was established with 9 members:

Mr Zhang Zhaohui, Professor of the FIO, is the leader of the PSC.

Mr Lei Guangchun is the Professor of the Beijing Forestry University.

Mr Chen Kelin is the Director of China office of the Wetlands International.

Mr Kangbin is Professor of the Ocean University of China.

Mr Qiu Ting is Professor of the Fuzhou University.

Mr Fu Chunxiang is the Researcher of the Qingdao Institute of Bioenergy and Bioprocess Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Mr Liu Wenhua is the Professor and Vice-president of the Shantou University.

Mr Sun Dianrong is the Researcher of the South China Sea Fisheries Research Institute, Chinese Academy of Fishery Sciences.

Mr Zhang Zhendong is the Researcher of the National Marine Environmental Monitoring Center.

17. Until NFGA became the new execution partner in 2019, the project implementation could not start because of the changes of the lead department and the government reshuffle. Since the Inception Workshop in June 2020, the major progress of project implementation for each component until June 2022 is summarized as follows:

Component 1: Policy, Planning and Institutional Arrangements;

- Two biodiversity conservation gap analyses conducted and strategy prepared.
- Conducted METT assessment for 11 MPAs and developed the report on ecological-based assessments of assessments.
- METT indicators are added to existing MPA assessment scorecards in Shandong and Guangdong.
- One long-term ecological "health" monitoring plans are adopted and implemented in Shandong project areas.
- 2 pollution sources affecting the two estuaries respectively resolved (Garbage on the beach in Guangdong and abandoned oil wells in Shandong)

Component 2: MPA Networking and Wetland Restoration;

- The overall workplans for 11 MPAs have been updated.
- Experience sharing activities have been organized between the 2 estuaries and among different MPAs.
- 6 MPAs in the Yellow River Estuary and 5 MPAs in the Pearl River Estuary have signed the Information Sharing Agreement.
- GIS system is operating in 11 MPAs, to provide technical support for the establishment and operation of MPA networking and comprehensively improve the management ability of MPAs.
- Nests of Oriental White Stork in 2021 are up to 120, with an increase of 117 compared to the baseline.

#### Component 3: Threat Analysis, Mitigation and Monitoring;

- Investment in ecological restoration has reached to 180 million USD in the Yellow River Estuary since 2017, and Report on Investment Analysis of Ecological Restoration in Yellow River Estuary Demonstration Area has been developed.
- 13 ecological restoration projects have been implemented in the Yellow River Estuary since 2017, with an area of 18,800 ha.
- Effective management control over 60% of area in Miaowan MPA had been enhanced.
- 5 local village conservation groups in 5 MPAs in Dongying have been formed.
- 1 local village conservation group formed (Guangdong).
- 590 volunteers (372 female) participated in the environment protection and popular science education.
- 2 MOUs have been drafted and will be signed in two estuaries.
- 2 plans and corresponding inter-agency protocols on medium to long-term ecosystem health monitoring have been developed.
- 2 medium to long-term restoration strategies for estuarine ecosystems developed.

#### Component 4: Capacity Building and Increasing Environmental Education and Public Awareness;

- Popular science lectures and painting competition for children have been organized. More than 300 children participated in the competition, and more than two-thirds of the finalists were girls.
- One popular science book about marine world has been developed for primary schools and distributed.
- More than 80% of students under 16 in project areas have known biodiversity
- Students' awareness on biodiversity conservation and estuarine ecosystems has been strengthened by 60% in project areas

#### Component 5: Project Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and Replication of Project Results.

- AHP monitoring and evaluating system was established and operated for sub-contracts.
- 5 PPRs and 2 PIRs have been submitted.

Communication and visibility: An official WebChat account has been established in July 2020, and 40 articles have been published. One project newsletter has been published in FAO website. Project events (Inception Workshop, painting competition, etc.) have been reported by various medias (details can be found in the PIRs)

18. As the project was severely delayed for many reasons, some of the activities/outputs designed no longer fit the current situations nor have allocated sufficient resource, posing a challenge for project implementation and requiring for adaptive management. The project is likely to request for an extension based on the recommendations of the MTR.

## **MTR purpose and scope**

19. As indicated in the project document, an MTR is to be undertaken at the project midterm to review project activities, procedures, outputs, results and financial flows against targets, over a given period of time and identify reasons for positive or negative variance, to suggest recommendations for corrective actions to get project back on track where negative variance is observed and to identify good practices and lessons-learned for future application. The MTR is a requirement of the GEF and also demanded by FAO for project monitoring and reporting purposes. It is being conducted for both accountability and learning purposes of GEF, FAO, and other participating institutions.
20. The main purpose of the MTR is to:
- Provide accountability – to respond to the information needs and interests of the Ministry of Natural Resources Management and other government institutions with decision-making powers on estuarine biodiversity, such as the Bureau of Fisheries (responsible for the conservation of the Chinese White Dolphin and other marine mammals), as well as to FAO Management and FAO’s GEF Coordination Unit (GCU);
  - Improve the project management by providing valuable information to managers and others responsible for regular project operations, such as the PMU, PTF, FAO’s GEF Coordination Unit (GCU) and the Project Steering Committee (PSC); and
  - Contribute to knowledge – in-depth understanding and contextualization of the project and its practices, of particular benefit to the government authorities for water resources management and biodiversity conservation, NGOs, GCU, FAO staff and future developers and implementers.
21. The main audience and intended users of the MTR are:
- The Chinese counterparts, such as Ministry of Finance as the GEF focal point in China, NFGA as the execution partner, government authorities on MPA management, environmental protection, planning, etc., will use the evaluation findings and conclusions for future practice;
  - The project team will improve the project management and implementation based on MTR recommendations;
  - The FAO Country Office, Project Management Team, members of Project Task Force in the FAO Headquarters and regional offices who will use the findings and lessons identified in the MTR to continue and improve the project activities and plan for sustainability of the results achieved; and
  - The GEF who will use the findings to inform strategic investment decisions in the future in China.

## **1.5 MTR scope**

22. The MTR will cover the project implementation period since its start in June 2017, until September 2022, and will analyze all the project components. It will cover all the geographical areas where the project has been implemented (Guangdong and Shandong), although not all the project locations might be visited by the national consultant.

23. The MTR will also consider the pre-conditions and arrangements in place that have contributed to – or hindered - the adequate implementation of the planned activities, including linkages and/or partnerships between the project and other major country initiatives.

## MTR objectives and key questions

### 1.6 MTR objectives

24. The MTR objectives describe precisely what it should achieve and what it should examine in relation to the GEF evaluation criteria. It will address and rate the following:

**Relevance** – the extent to which the intervention’s design and intended results are consistent with local, national, sub-regional and regional environmental and development priorities and policies of the Government of China and to GEF and FAO strategic priorities and objectives; its complementarity with existing interventions and relevance to project stakeholders and beneficiaries; its suitability to the context of the intervention over time.

**Effectiveness** – the degree to which the intervention has achieved or expects to achieve results (project outputs, outcomes, objectives and impacts, including Global Environmental Benefits) taking into account key factors influencing the results, including an assessment of whether sufficient capacity has been built to ensure the delivery of results by the end of project and beyond and the likelihood of mid- and longer-term impacts.

**Efficiency** – the cost-effectiveness of the project and timeliness of activities; the extent to which the intervention has achieved value for resources by converting inputs (funds, personnel, expertise, equipment, etc.) into results in the timeliest and least costly way compared with alternatives.

**Sustainability** – the (likely) continuation of positive effects from the intervention after it has ended and the potential for scale-up and/or replication; any financial, socio-political, institutional and governance, or environmental risks to sustainability of project results and benefits; any evidence of replication or catalysis of project results.

**Factors affecting performance** – the main factors to be considered are:

- project design and readiness for implementation (e.g. sufficient partner capacity to begin operations, changes in context between formulation and operational start);
- project execution, including project management (execution modality as well as the involvement of counterparts and different stakeholders), capacity of the PMO and related staff;
- project implementation, including supervision by FAO (BH, LTO and FLO), backstopping, and general PTF input;
- financial management and mobilization of expected co-financing;
- project partnerships and stakeholder involvement (including the degree of ownership of project results by stakeholders), political support from government, institutional support from operating partners (such as regional branches of agricultural extension services or forestry authorities);
- communication, public awareness and knowledge management; and
- application of an M&E system, including M&E design, implementation and budget.

**Cross-cutting dimensions** – considerations such as gender, indigenous-peoples and minority-group concerns and human rights; the environmental and social safeguards applied to a project require, among other things, a review of the Environmental and Social Safeguards (ESS) risk classification and risk-mitigation provisions identified at the project’s formulation stage.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> FAO applies an online screening system during the project design phase. This is mandatory, even if the project was approved before FAO adopted the GEF Policy on Agency Minimum Standards on Environmental and Social Safeguards (GEF, 2011) in February 2015, as FAO had already applied the Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines in 2011 (FAO, 2012a) to screen and rate the risks of every FAO project. Consequently, the MTR team should review and confirm the ESS assessments and risk status at mid-term and any changes suggested, if needed. The most recent GEF guidance can be found in GEF (2019b). A GEF project should not cause any harm to the environment or to any stakeholder and, where applicable, will take measures to prevent and/or mitigate any adverse effects.

## 1.7 MTR questions

<b>Box A4.1. Proposed MTR questions</b>	
<b>1. Relevance</b> (rating required)	<p>Are the project outcomes congruent with country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries (local communities, men and women, etc.)?</p> <p>Has there been any change in the relevance of the project since its formulation, such as the adoption of new national policies, plans or programmes that affect the relevance of the project's objectives and goals? If so, are there any changes that need to be made to the project to make it more relevant?</p>
<b>2. Effectiveness of project results</b> (rating required)	<p>To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives? Has biodiversity conservation been incorporated into the policy, legal and regulatory frameworks governing MPA management in China? Has the project strengthened the cooperation between MPAs? Has effective on-the-ground measures in the two project sites that increase biodiversity protection weighed against development objectives been demonstrated? Has effective generation and processing of advanced information system relevant to biodiversity conservation in the pilot sites been demonstrated?</p> <p>What broader results has the project had at regional and global level to date? Were there any unintended consequences? Is there any evidence of environmental stress reduction or environmental status change, reflecting global environmental benefits or any change in policy, legal or regulatory frameworks? To what extent can the achievement of results be attributed to the GEF-funded component?</p>
<b>3. Efficiency</b> (rating required)	<p>To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively? To what extent has project management been able to adapt to any changing conditions to improve the efficiency of project implementation? How much has the co-financing contributed to the project outcomes and objectives? How does the project cost/time versus output/outcomes equation compare to that of similar projects?</p> <p>To what extent has the project built on existing agreements, initiatives, data sources, synergies and complementarities with other projects, partnerships, etc. and avoided duplication of similar activities by other groups and initiatives?</p> <p>Has the Execution Agreement been understood and followed efficiently?</p>
<b>4. Sustainability</b> (rating required)	<p>What is the likelihood that the project results will be useful or persist after the end of the project? What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project results and its benefits (consider financial, socioeconomic, institutional and governance, and environmental aspects, as well as the risks identified in the project document)?</p> <p>What project results, lessons or experiences have been replicated (in different geographic areas) or scaled up (in the same geographic area, but on a much larger scale and funded by other sources)? What results, lessons or experiences are likely to be replicated or scaled up in the near future?</p> <p>Has the project established sustainable institutional arrangements or cross-sector partnerships?</p>

<p><b>5. Factors affecting progress</b> (ratings required)</p>	<p>Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives? What can be done to increase the likelihood of positive impacts from the project?</p> <p>Is the project design suited to delivering the expected outcomes? Is the project's causal logic coherent and clear? To what extent are the project's objectives and components clear, practical and feasible within the timeframe allowed? To what extent was gender integrated into the project's objectives and results framework? Were other actors – civil society or private sector – involved in project design or implementation and what was the effect on project results?</p> <p>Is the project on track as it was originally designed? Is there any delay in the project approval, implementation and reporting process? What are the major reasons of the delay?</p> <p>To what extent did the executing agency effectively discharge its role and responsibilities in managing and administering the project? How well is the PMO functioning? Is there sufficient human resources, financial resources, etc. for the PMO operation? How strong is the capacity of the PMO staff? What have been the main challenges in terms of project management and administration? How well have risks been identified and managed? What changes are needed to improve delivery in the latter half of the project?</p> <p>What have been the financial-management challenges of the project? To what extent has pledged co-financing been delivered? Has any additional leveraged co-financing been provided since implementation?</p> <p>To what extent has FAO delivered oversight and supervision and backstopping (technical, administrative and operational) during project identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution? What kind of support or changes is expected from FAO by the execution partners?</p> <p>To what extent have stakeholders, such as government agencies, civil society, disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, people with disabilities and the private sector, been involved in project formulation and implementation? What has been the effect of their involvement or non-involvement on project results? How do the various stakeholder groups see their own engagement with the project? What are the mechanisms of their involvement and how could these be improved? What are the strengths and challenges of the project's partnerships?</p> <p>How effective has the project been in communicating and promoting its key messages and results to partners, stakeholders and a general audience? How can this be improved? How is the project assessing, documenting and sharing its results and lessons learned and experiences? To what extent are communication products and activities likely to support the sustainability and scaling up of project results? How effective is the communication and promotion plan for the rest of the project implementation period?</p> <p>Is the project's M&amp;E system practical and sufficient? How has stakeholder engagement and gender assessment been integrated into the M&amp;E system? How could this be improved?</p> <p>Does the M&amp;E system operate per the M&amp;E plan? Has information been gathered in a systematic manner, using appropriate methodologies? To what extent has information generated by the M&amp;E system during project implementation been used to adapt and improve project planning and execution, achieve outcomes and ensure sustainability? Are there gender-disaggregated targets and indicators? How can the M&amp;E system be improved?</p> <p><i>Did the OPIM contribute to ensure major ownership and sustainability of the project results? Did the OPIM contribute to increase national, regional and sub-regional ownership to support better</i></p>
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	<i>sustainability of results? And to strengthen capacities of regional, sub-regional and/or national entities?</i>
<b>6. Cross-cutting priorities</b>	<p>To what extent were gender considerations taken into account in designing and implementing the project? Has the project been designed and implemented in a manner that ensures gender-equitable participation and benefits? Was a gender analysis done?</p> <p>To what extent were environmental and social concerns taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project?</p>

25. It should be noted that GEF is placing increased emphasis on gender concerns and how its programmes and projects contribute to gender equality and women’s empowerment (GEF, 2017a; 2017b; 2018a; 2018b). Consequently, the MTR should, as much as possible, collect and report sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive indicators and results. GEF is also paying more attention to stakeholder engagement and development, the use of knowledge products and the identification of good practices. All of these areas require specific reporting when the MTR report is uploaded to the GEF Portal webpage.

## Methodology

26. The MTR will adhere to the UNEG Norms & Standards (UNEG, 2016) and align with the FAO–GEF MTR Guide and annexes detailing methodological guidelines and practices. The MTR will adopt a consultative and transparent approach, keeping internal and external stakeholders informed throughout the MTR process. The evidence and information gathered will be triangulated to underpin its validity and analysis and to support its conclusions and recommendations. The MTR must provide evidence-based information that is credible, reliable and useful.

27. The main evaluation tools and methods will include the following (note: Final decisions about the specific design and methodology for the MTR should emerge from consultations between the project team, the MTR consultants and key stakeholders on what is appropriate and feasible in order to meet the MTR’s purpose and objectives and answer the MTR’s questions.):

- A **desk-review** of existing project documents and reports (e.g. the project document, the inception report, the Operational Partners Agreement, project implementation review, project progress reports, backstopping mission reports, audit reports, newsletters, etc.). The MTR team will propose the project’s **Theory of Change (ToC)** after the desk-review. The ToC will outline the multiple linkages, drivers and assumptions between the project objectives, outputs and outcomes to the national goals, and will support the evaluation process.
- **Remote semi-structured interviews** with key stakeholders, including representatives of FAO project taskforce members, PSC members, the operational partners, the local government authorities, key national consultants, important service providers, etc. The first draft of the MTR report will be developed based on the desk-review and the interviews, and will be shared with FAO and national partners for comments.
- **Field visits** to the project sites in Guangdong and Dongying will be carried out when the COVID-19 pandemic is under control and within 2022, to verify project implementation and results in the field, collect feedback from local partners, as well as analyse the capacities of the local project

teams. Face-to-face interviews and meetings will be carried out during the field visits. The MTR report will be adjusted after the field visit.

A **wrap-up meeting** will be held at the end of the field mission to share initial findings and conclusions with the Project Coordination Unit and representatives of the PSC (including FAOR China).

28. Final decisions about the specific design and methodology for the MTR should emerge from consultations between the project team, the MTR consultants and key stakeholders on what is appropriate and feasible in order to meet the MTR's purpose and objectives and answer the MTR's questions.

## Roles and responsibilities

29. The **BH** is accountable for the MTR process and report and is responsible for the initiation, management and finalization of the MTR process. Depending on availability and commitments, the BH have designated Zhao Wei as the **RM**, to act on his behalf.
30. With the assistance of the project's **LTO** and the **FAO GEF CU, FLO and MTR focal point**, and guidance from this document and the main MTR Guide, the BH/RM is responsible for the drafting and finalizing the terms of reference and providing input to the background and context section. The BH/RM is also responsible for identifying and recruiting the MTR team members, in consultation with the GCU and the LTO. In collaboration with the GCU, the BH/RM also briefs the MTR team on the MTR methodology and process and leads the organization of MTR missions. The BH/RM and the GCU's MTR focal point review the draft and final MTR reports to assure their quality in terms of presentation, compliance with the terms of reference, timely delivery, quality, clarity and soundness of evidence and analysis supporting the conclusions and recommendations. The BH is also responsible for leading and coordinating the preparation of the FAO Management Response and the associated follow-up report, supported by the LTO and other members of the PTF.
31. The **FAO GEF CU** will appoint a focal point to provide technical backstopping throughout the MTR process, including guidance and punctual support to the BH/RM and MTR team on technical issues related to the GEF and the MTR. This includes support in identifying potential MTR team members,<sup>33</sup> reviewing candidate qualifications and participating in the selection of consultants, as well as briefing the MTR team on the MTR process, relevant methodology and tools. The GCU also follows up with the BH to ensure the timely preparation of the Management Response.
32. **PTF** members, including the BH, are required to participate in meetings with the MTR team, make all necessary information and documentation available and comment on the terms of reference and MTR report. However, their level of involvement will depend on team members' individual roles and level of participation in the project.
33. The **National Project Director** (NPD) facilitates the participation of government partners in the MTR process and supports the PMU in ensuring good communication across government. The NPD should also ensure the translation and distribution of the MTR deliverables to related partners and

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<sup>33</sup> The BH/RM should be responsible for the administrative procedures associated with the recruitment of the MTR consultants.

stakeholders. The **Project Steering Committee** (PSC) facilitates government and other partner and stakeholder participation in the MTR process.

34. The **MTR team** is responsible for developing and applying the MTR methodology, producing a brief MTR inception report, conducting the MTR and producing the MTR report. All team members will participate in briefing and debriefing meetings, discussions and field visits. They will contribute written inputs to the draft and final versions of the MTR report, which may not reflect the views of the government or of FAO. The MTR team leader will guide and coordinate the MTR team members in their specific tasks and lead the preparation of the draft and final reports. The team leader will consolidate team inputs with his/her own and will have overall responsibility for delivering the MTR report. The MTR team will agree with the GCU MTR focal point on the outline of the report early in the MTR process. The MTR team is free to expand the scope, criteria, questions and issues listed above, and develop its own MTR tools and framework, within the timeframe and resources available and based on discussions with the BH/RM and PTF. Although an MTR report is not subject to technical clearance by FAO, the BH/RM and GCU do provide quality assurance checks of all MTR reports.
35. Ministry of Finance, as the **GEF Operational Focal Point** (OFP) in China, will be involved in the MTR, in accordance with the GEF Evaluation Policy (2019). The BH will inform the OFP of the MTR process and the MTR team is encouraged to consult with him/her during the review process. However, from the previous experiences, MoF does not usually join the interviews of any specific GEF project. The team will also keep the OFP informed of progress and send him/her a copy of the draft and final MTR reports for review and feedback.

## **MTR team composition and profile**

36. The MTR team will be formed by one international consultant, as the team leader and one national consultant, as the team member.
37. The team leader should have advanced English writing and communication skills; a graduate degree in environment, ecology, natural resource management, biodiversity, or related fields; at least 15 years of experience on project management and evaluation; and experience as an evaluation team leader. Work experience in Asia, especially China, will be an asset.
38. The team member should have advanced English writing and communication skills; a graduate degree in environment, ecology, natural resource management, biodiversity, or related fields; and at least 10 years of experience on project management and evaluation. Work experience with international organizations, especially evaluation on UN, FAO or GEF projects is an asset.
39. Please refer to the TORs of the 2 consultants attached for more details.

The MTR consultants should be independent of any organizations that have been involved in designing, executing or advising on any aspect of the project being evaluated in the MTR and should not have been involved in any aspect of the project previously.

## MTR products (deliverables)

40. This section describes the key deliverables the MTR team is expected to produce. At a minimum, these products should include the following (**all deliverables must be in English**):

- **The MTR inception report.** The MTR team will prepare an inception report before beginning data collection. This should detail the MTR team's understanding of what is being assessed and why, and their understanding of the project and its aims. It serves as a map and reference for planning and conducting an MTR and as a useful tool for summarizing and visually presenting the MTR design and methodology in discussions with stakeholders. The inception report details the GEF evaluation criteria, the questions the MTR seeks to answer (in the form of an MTR matrix), the data sources and data collection methods, analysis tools or methods appropriate for each data source and data collection method, and the standard or measure by which each question will be evaluated. The inception report should include a proposed schedule of tasks, activities and deliverables, designating a team member with lead responsibility for each task or product (as appropriate).
- **The draft MTR report(s).** The project team, BH/RM, GCU and key stakeholders in the MTR will review the draft MTR report to ensure its accuracy and quality in two review rounds: (a) a first review, taking around 10 working days, by the project team and FAO (BH, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point), then a second review, also taking around 10 working days, by the government counterpart(s), key external partners and stakeholders.
- **The final MTR report.** This should include an executive summary. Supporting data and analysis should be annexed to the report, if deemed important, to complement the main report. The executive summary should include the following paragraphs in order to update the GEF Portal: (1) information on progress, challenges and outcomes on stakeholder engagement; (2) information on progress on gender-responsive measures; and (3) information on knowledge activities and products.
- **A two-page summary** of key findings, lessons, recommendations and messages from the MTR report, produced by the RM and PMU, in consultation with the MTR team, that can be disseminated to the wider public for general information on the project's results and performance to date. This can be posted as a briefing paper on the project's website but more creative and innovative multimedia approaches, such as video, photos, sound recordings, social media, short stories, infographics or even comic or cartoon format, may be more effective depending on the circumstances.
- **Participation in knowledge-sharing events**, such as stakeholder debriefings, as needed.

## MTR timeframe

41. This section lists the due date or timeframe of the MTR (subject to be revised by the MTR team in the inception report based on the timing of the launch of the MTR and the initial discussions with FAO China, project team and PTF members) and describes all tasks and deliverables (such as briefings, the draft report and final report), as well as the associated roles and responsibilities of the key MTR individuals and groups.

**Table A4.2 Suggested MTR timeline**

<b>Task</b>	<b>When/duration (recommended)</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Terms of reference preparation	July, 2022	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Terms of reference finalization	August, 2022	BH/RM
Team identification	August, 2022	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Team recruitment	August, 2022	BH with input from the GCU for international and national consultants
Briefing of MTR team	September, 2022	BH/RM, supported by PTF and GCU as necessary
Reading background documentation	September, 2022	MTR team in preparation for the MTR
MTR inception report	September, 2022	MTR team
Quality assurance and clearance of the MTR inception report	September, 2022	BH/RM and the GCU MTR focal point
Travel arrangements and organization of the agenda and travel itinerary in country for the field mission	September, 2022	BH/RM, project team and MTR team
Interviews with stakeholders	October, 2022	FAO PTF and national partners, consultants and service providers
MTR missions – confirmation of interviews, meetings and visits	10-15 days for the MTR field mission during 15 to 30 October 2022	National consultant with the support of the PMU
Production of first draft report for circulation	November, 2022	MTR team
Circulation and review of first draft MTR report	November, 2022	BH/RM, PMU, GCU MTR focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by BH/RM)
Production of second draft MTR report	November, 2022	MTR team
Circulation of second draft MTR report	November, 2022	BH/RM and key external stakeholders (organized by BH/RM)
Management Response	December, 2022	BH
Production of final MTR report	November, 2022	MTR team
Follow-up reporting in FAO PPR or GEF PIR	June 2023 and January 2024	BH

**42. Documents to be provided to the MTR team****Box A4.2. Documents to be provided to the MTR team (“project information package”)**

1. GEF PIF with technical clearance
2. GEF-approved project document
3. Project inception report
4. Six-monthly FAO PPRs
5. Annual workplans and budgets (including budget revisions)
6. All annual GEF PIR reports
7. Operational Partners Agreement under OPIM and Amendment No. 1 to No. 3

8. List of stakeholders
9. List of interviewees
10. List of project sites and site location maps (for planning mission itineraries and fieldwork)
11. Relevant technical, backstopping and project-supervision mission reports
12. Minutes of the meetings of the PSC, FAO PTF and other relevant groups
13. Any ESS analysis and mitigation plans produced during the project design period and online records on FPMIS
14. Any awareness-raising and communications materials produced by the project, such as brochures, leaflets, presentations for meetings, project web address, etc.
15. FAO policy documents in relation to topics such as FAO Strategic Objectives and gender
16. Finalized GEF focal-area tracking tools at CEO endorsement, as well as updated tracking tools at mid-term.
17. Financial management information, including an up-to-date co-financing table, a summary report on the project's financial management and expenditures to date, a summary of any financial revisions made to the project and their purpose, and copies of any completed audits for comment
18. The GEF Gender Policy (GEF, 2017), GEF Gender Implementation Strategy (GEF, 2018a), GEF Guidance on Gender Equality (GEF, 2018b) and the GEF Guide to Advance Gender Equality in GEF Projects and Programmes (GEF, 2018c)

*The following documents should also be made available to the MTR team on request or as required:*

19. FAO Country Programme Framework documents, the FAO Guide to the Project Cycle (FAO, 2012b), FAO Environment and Social Management Guidelines (FAO, 2015), FAO Policy on Gender Equity, the Guide to Mainstreaming Gender in FAO's Project Cycle (FAO, 2017a) and the Free, Prior and Informed Consent Manual (FAO, 2016)



## Appendix 2. MTR itinerary, including field missions (agenda)

Due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, all field missions have been suspended until further notice.

Task	When/duration (recommended)	Responsibility
Terms of reference preparation	July, 2022	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Terms of reference finalization	August, 2022	BH/RM
Team identification	August, 2022	BH/RM, LTO, FLO and GCU MTR focal point
Team recruitment	15 September 2022	BH with input from the GCU for international and national consultants
Preliminary Zoom meeting with the MTR focal point	27 September 2022	MTR Focal point and MTR team
Briefing of MTR team	29 September 2022	BH/RM, supported by PTF and GCU as necessary
Reading background documentation	16-30 September 2022	MTR team in preparation for the MTR
MTR Inception report	12 October 2022	MTR team
Quality assurance and clearance of the MTR inception report	26-28 October 2022	BH/RM and the GCU MTR focal point
TenCent remote interviews with stakeholders in China	10-26 October 2022	MTR team with the support of the PMO
Field visits to PRE and YRE	27 October to 03 November 2022	MTR team (national consultant only)
Remote interview with the PSC Chair	04 November 2022	MTR team
Submission of first draft report for circulation	22 November 2022	MTR team

Debriefing on the MTR's main findings	28 November 2022	MTR team and FAO stakeholders
Submission of responses to the first draft MTR report	09 December 2022	BH/RM, PMU, GCU MTR focal point, LTO for comments and quality control (organized by BH/RM)
Submission of final draft MTR report	16 December 2022	MTR team
Circulation of final draft MTR report	19 December 2022	BH/RM and key external stakeholders (organized by BH/RM)
Submission of the final MTR report summary	December 2022	MTR team
Final debriefing with FAO-CN (if required)	December 2022	BH, RMs, GCU, National stakeholders
Management Response	January 2022	BH
Follow-up reporting in FAO PPR or GEF PIR	June 2023	BH

### Appendix 3. Stakeholder analysis with interview dates and times

No./ Order by date	Key stakeholders	Role in the project	Reason for their inclusion/ exclusion from the MTR	Priority for MTR 1 = essential 2 = desirable 3 = complementary	How and when should they be involved in the MTR (Desk/Field Phase)
<b>1. Active stakeholders with direct responsibility for the project implementation, e.g. FAO, project management</b>					
<b>FAO-Rome / FAO-Regional Office in Bangkok / FAO-China</b>					
<b>1/1</b>	FAO-CN	Name: Zhao Wei (female) Position: GEF Portfolio Project Officer	Responsible for coordinating all reporting requirements of Project 045 including its MTR	1	Date: Tues 27 Sept. 2022 Time: 16h00 (Beijing)/ 09h00 (London) <b>Zoom Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://fao.zoom.us/j/98299392752">https://fao.zoom.us/j/98299392752</a>
<b>2/2</b>	FAO-RAP	Name: Le He (female) Position: Lead Technical Officer (LTO)	LTO provides technical advice and backstopping to the project, and monitor and certify the technical quality of the PMU's operations.	1	Date: Mon 10 Oct. 2022 Time: 15h00 (Beijing) /14h00 (Bangkok) / 09h00 (Rome) / 08h00 (London) <b>Zoom Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://fao.zoom.us/j/97807270091">https://fao.zoom.us/j/97807270091</a>
	FAO-R	Name: Yurie Naito (female) Position: Funding Liaison Officer (FLO), GEF Coordination Unit, FAO	FLO reviews and approves project progress reports, implementation reviews and financial reports, including budget revisions. FLO also participates in the mid-term reviews, final evaluations, and the development of corrective actions in the project implementation strategy.	1	
<b>3/3</b>	FAO-CN	Name: Carlos Watson Position: Budget Holder	Budget Holder, responsible for the project's budget	1	Date: Wed 12 Oct. 2022 Time: 15h00 (Beijing) / 08h00 (London) <b>Zoom Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://fao.zoom.us/j/92768123143">https://fao.zoom.us/j/92768123143</a>

4/-	FAO-CN	Name: Han Yan Position: FAO-CN Finance officer	Responsible for day-to-day management of project funding	2	Not deemed necessary after consulting with FAO-CN, because the BH has been interviewed.
	FAO-CN	Name: Zhang Zhongjun Position: FAO-CN PSC member	The PSC is responsible for guiding and approving the project's work plans and budgets and supervising the executing and implementing partners fulfil their duties and achieve the projects results and objectives.	1	
	FAO-CN	Name: Not assigned Position: Chief Technical Advisor (CTA)	In close coordination with national PM, LTO, national/provincial experts, the CTA provides overall technical support for project implementation (annual work plan formulation, progress reporting, compiling guidelines, field implementation, M&E, etc.	1	Not applicable as the project does not have a CTA.
<b>Project Expert Committee (PEC)</b>					
5/4	FIO	Name: Zhang Zhaohui Position: Professor, FIO	Leader of the PEC	1	<p>Date: Thurs 13 Oct. 2022</p> <p>Time: 15h00 (Beijing) / 08h00 (London)</p> <p><b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b>  <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/GntE62JUsl40">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/GntE62JUsl40</a>  Meeting ID: 812 771 607</p>
	CAS	Name: Fu Chunxiang Position: Professor of the Qingdao Institute of Bioenergy and Bioprocess Technology, Chinese Academy of Sciences	Member of PEC		

	Wetlands International	Name: Chen Kelin Position: Director of China office of the Wetlands International	Member of PEC		
	Fuzhou University	Name: Qiu Ting Position: Professor of Fuzhou University	Member of PEC		
	The Ocean University of China	Name: Kangbin Position: Professor of the Ocean University of China	Member of PSC		
<b>Project Management Office</b>					
<b>6/7</b>	FIO	Name: Cong Bailin Position: Associate Professor, FIO and Project Manager	Project Manager oversees the planning and implementation of the project	1	<b>Field Phase</b> Date: Sat. 15 Oct. 2022  Time: 15h00 (Beijing) / 08h00 (London)  <b>Tencent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/ceReZggk4hyX">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/ceReZggk4hyX</a> Meeting ID: 727 758 412
	FIO	Name: Lin Jing (female) Position: FIO, Project clerk	Gender expert following women’s participation in the project		
	FIO	Name: Deng Aifang (female) Position: Research Associate, FIO	Supporting project implementation		
	FIO	Name: Yu Jia Position: Engineer of the Division of Asset Management	Responsible for procurement and finance of the Project		
	FIO	Name: Wei Bingyang	Responsible for making film and videos		

		Position: Intern			
<b>Consultants/Consulting institutes</b>					
<b>7/5</b>	FIO	Name: Zhao Linlin Position: Associate professor	Consultant providing technical assistance on MPA policy	1	<b>Interview MPA policy (SSI)</b>  Date: Thurs 13 Oct. 2022  Time: 16h00 (Beijing) / 09h00 (London)  <b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/GntE62JUsl4Q">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/GntE62JUsl4Q</a> Meeting ID: 812 771 607
	LMETRC	Name: Li Shuyun (female) Position: Lanzhi Marine Ecological Technology Research Centre	Consultant providing TA on general provincial environmental policy analysis and research in Shandong		
<b>8/8</b>	Technology Research Institute	Name: Wang Zhaohui Position: Dongying Yellow River Delta Coastal Zone Ecological Restoration Technology Research Institute Co., Ltd	Consultant providing monitoring and coordination of 6 MPAs in the YRE	1	<b>Interview on MPA monitoring (SSI)</b>  Date: Wed 19 Oct. 2022  Time: 14h00 (Beijing) / 07h00 (London)  <b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/J9x7aJovZPNJ">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/J9x7aJovZPNJ</a> Meeting ID: 645-656-534
	Beijing Xinzhigan Technology Co., Ltd	Name: Zhang Peng (Male) Position: Deputy General Manager	Development and Application guidance of GIS digital information system in the Pearl River Estuary and Yellow River Estuary		
	Engineering Co.	Name: Tian Yanli (female) Position: Dongying Hongxin Ecological Environment Restoration Engineering Co., Ltd	Consultant providing TA on the assessment and conference, skills training, primary school curriculum development in Shandong Prov.		
<b>9/9</b>	SCS Monitoring Centre (MNR)	Name: Deng Wei	Ecosystem monitoring and data sharing in the PRE	1	<b>Interview on developing learning and awareness on MPAs (SSI)</b>

		Position: Member of the South China Sea Monitoring Centre (ex SOA)			Date: Wed 19 Oct. 2022
	Engineering Co.	Name: Kang Lina (female) Position: Dongying Hongxin Ecological Env. Restoration Engineering Co., Ltd	Consultant providing TA on ecosystem health monitoring and biodiversity analysis in the YRE		Time: 16h00 (Beijing) / 09h00 (London)
	Yat-sen University	Name: Li Meiyun (female) Position: Sun Yat-sen University	Landscape analysis and ecotourism research of the Pearl River Estuary, Coordination meetings among 5 MPAs in Guangdong and volunteer training	2	Unavailable due to a family bereavement
<b>2. Active stakeholders with authority to make decisions on the project (e.g. PSC)</b>					
<b>10/10</b>	FIO	Name: Liu Shenghao Position: Associate professor	Consultant providing technical assistance on ecological restoration (freshwater demand in YRE)		<b>Interview on ecological restoration (SSI)</b>
	Technology Research Institute	Name: Sui Yuzheng Position: Dongying Yellow River Delta Coastal Zone Ecological Restoration Technology Research Institute Co., Ltd	Consultant providing TA on landscape analysis and land use change, socio-economic studies, baseline surveys and ecological restoration in the YRE	1	Date: Thurs 20 Oct. 2022
	CAFS	Name: Fang Liang Position: South China Sea Fisheries Research Institute	Consultant providing research on the ecology of the Pearl River Estuary, Chinese White Dolphin (CWD) monitoring, and the integrated management and networking strategy of 5 MPAs		Time: 14h00 (Beijing) / 07h00 (London)
					<b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/n1oR1cjDzWcM">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/n1oR1cjDzWcM</a> 574-126-198
<b>11/13</b>	FIO	Names: Prof Qiao Fangli Position: Director General of FIO	Dr Qiao is in charge of FIO's foreign affairs and international cooperation.		Date: 25 Oct. 2022
					Time: 14h00 (Beijing) / 07h00 (London)

		Prof Li Li, (female) Position: Director of FIO's International Cooperation	Dr Li Li is a member of the PSC	2	<b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> ID: 155-317-983
		Name: Wang Zongling Position: Deputy director General of FIO	Dr Wang is Deputy chair of the PSC.		Unavailable due to work commitments
<b>12/15</b>	NFGA	Name: Yan Chenggao Position: Deputy Director General, Department of Protected Natural Area Management	Project Director and Chair of the PSC	1	Date: 04 Nov. 2022  Time: 14h30 (Beijing) / 06h30 (London)  <b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/H5MQz0kC5wuJ">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/H5MQz0kC5wuJ</a> ID number: 225-958-044
	NFGA	Name: Yuan Xiaohong Position: Deputy DG, Department of Protected Natural Area Management	Member of PSC	2	Interview with Mr. Yan Chenggao was considered sufficient as they are from the same insitution
	Shandong Prov. Government	Name: Mr. Li Chengjin Position: Deputy Director General of Department of Natural Resources	Member of PSC (Shandong Province), but engagement in Project 045 has been limited as he has a new post. He is likely to be replaced by Mr Liu Shengxiang, Director of Natural Resources Department of Shandong Province in the next PSC meeting planned in November 2022.	3	Interviewed Mr. Liu Shengxiang & Mr. Liu Pei, from the Natural Resources Department of Shandong Province instead on 18/10/2022.

	Guangdong Prov. Government	Name: Wu Xiaomou Position: Deputy Director General, Forestry Bureau	Member of PSC (Guangdong Prov), but engagement in Project 045 has been limited as he has a new post. He is likely to be replaced in as PSC member by Mr. Chen Haisheng, Section Chief of Guangdong Provincial Forestry Bureau at the next PSC meeting planned in November 2022.	3	Interviewed Mr Chen Haisheng, Section Chief of Guangdong Provincial Forestry Bureau, instead on 18/10/2022.
13/6	Shandong Provincial Gov. / Natural Resources Department	Names: Liu Shengxiang & Liu Pei Positions: Director of Natural Resources Department of Shandong Province & Section Chief of Dongying Marine Bureau	Main contact persons in Shandong Provincial Government.	1	<p><b>Interview on coordination of project planning, implementation and monitoring in both provinces (SSI)</b></p> <p>Date: Tues 18 Oct. 2022</p> <p>Time: 14:00-16:00 / 07:00-09:00 (London)</p> <p><b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b>  <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/PSaC2QxNy6y0">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/PSaC2QxNy6y0</a> ,  meeting ID:287-244-574</p>
	Guangdong Provincial Gov. / Provincial Forestry Bureau	Name: Chen Haisheng Position: Section Chief of Guangdong Provincial Forestry Bureau	Main contact person in Guangdong Provincial Government.		
<b>3. Stakeholders at grassroots level who benefit directly or indirectly from the intervention (gender disaggregated)</b>					
14/11	MPA management authorities in <b>Pearl River (Guangdong)</b>	Names of MPA managers in PRE: 1) You Yilai, 2) Zhang Chaoming 3) Feng Kangkang 4) Hu Liuliu (female)	1) Deputy DG Management Bureau of Zhuhai Qi'ao Provincial Nature Reserve 2) Deputy DG of Zhujiangkou Chinese White Dolphin Reserve 3) Jiangmen Chinese White Dolphin Provincial National Reserve 4) Neilingding-Futian National Nature Reserve	1	<p><b>Group meeting of MPA managers from PRE</b></p> <p>Date: Fri 21 Oct. 2022</p> <p>Time: 14h00-15:30 / 07h00-08h30 (London)</p> <p><b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b></p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5) Wu Pingsheng</li> <li>6) Liu Ganghui</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5) Zhuhai Miaowan Civic Coral Reserve</li> <li>6) Dongying Laizhou Bay Razor Clam Ecological National Special MPA</li> </ul>		<p><a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/gbe2OW6QVJdZ">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/gbe2OW6QVJdZ</a></p> <p>Meeting ID: 335-976-643</p>
<b>15/12</b>	MPA management authorities in <b>Yellow River (Shandong)</b>	<p>Names of MPA managers in YRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Li Pengfei</li> <li>2) Yu Hailing (female)</li> <li>3) He Shulin</li> <li>4) Yang Zhisan</li> <li>5) Su Xiuwen</li> <li>6) Wang Yongfeng</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Member of Natural Resources and Planning Bureau of Dongying City</li> <li>2) Senior Engineer of Shandong Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve</li> <li>3) Deputy director of the Shallow Sea Shellfish Ecological National Special MPA</li> <li>4) The Lijin Benthic Fish Ecological National Special MPA</li> <li>5) Deputy Director of the Yellow River Estuary Ecological National Special MPA</li> <li>6) Captain of Marine Fishery Supervision and Supervision Battalion in the Dongying Guangrao Polychaeta National Ecological Special MPA</li> </ul>	1	<p>Mon 24 Oct. 2022</p> <p>Time: 14h00 / 07h00 (London)</p> <p><b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b>  <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/4tDbRueB29Tn">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/4tDbRueB29Tn</a>                      Meeting ID: 430-928-076</p>

<p><b>16/14</b></p>	<p>Grassroot beneficiaries in <b>YRE, Shandong</b> (Dongying and Qingdao Cities).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Zhang Guangyi</li> <li>2) Li Jiangtao</li> <li>3) Pan Jing (female)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Deputy Principal of Dongying Shengli Jinhua Middle (Green) School</li> <li>2) Deputy Principal of Keda Primary School in Dongying Economic and Tech. Dev. Zone</li> <li>3) Teaching Director of Qingdao Tong'an Road Primary School</li> </ol>		<p>Date: 25 Oct. 2022 Time: 15h00 (Beijing) / 08h00 (London)</p> <p><b>TenCent Meeting Link:</b> <a href="https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/eK2hZWxij6uT">https://meeting.tencent.com/dm/eK2hZWxij6uT</a> Meeting ID: 155-317-983</p>
<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> field visit</b></p>	<p>Grassroot beneficiaries in <b>PRE, Guangdong</b></p>	<p>Names of beneficiaries selected for interview:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Guo Hualiang</li> <li>2) Zhong Xiaochun</li> <li>3) Lu Xueme (female)</li> <li>4) Wu Huixian</li> <li>5) Liu Wei</li> <li>6) Sun Zhengzheng</li> <li>7) Zhong Xinlan (female)</li> <li>8) Li Liping (female)</li> <li>9) Ding Gongtao (female)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Forest Protector of Prov. Nature Res. Man. Office of Qi'ao Dangan Island, Zhuhai.</li> <li>2) Forest Protector of Prov. Nature Res. Management Office of Qi'ao Dangan Is.</li> <li>3) Haole Nature Research Base</li> <li>4) Director Assistant of Jiangmen No. 1 Middle School Development Center</li> <li>5) Chief of the Admin. Office of Jiangmen Prov Chinese White Dolphin Nature Reserve</li> <li>6) Member of Prov. Nature Reserve Management Office of Qi'ao Dangan Is.</li> <li>7) Residents of Qi'ao Dangan Island Community, Zhuhai, Guangdong/Chen Pi Classroom Tutor</li> <li>8) Residents of Qi'ao Dangan Island Community, Zhuhai, Guangdong/Tutor of Tea and Fruit Science Popularization School</li> </ol> <p>Residents of Qi'ao Dangan Island Community, Zhuhai, Guangdong/Tutor of Tea and Fruit Science Popularization School</p>	<p>1</p>	<p><b>Field interviews in PRE – Qi'ao Dangan Island (SSI)</b></p> <p>Date: Thur 27 Oct. 2022 to Sun. 30 Oct. 2022</p>

2 <sup>nd</sup> field visit	Grassroot beneficiaries in <b>YRE, Shandong</b> (Interviewees are located in Dongying and Qingdao Cities. The distance between two cities is about 300km)	1) Kan Rentao 2) Zhao Long 3) Zhou Gang 4) Dong Zaihua 5) Wang Mingguang	1) Deputy General Manager of Dongying Kanghua Marine Technology Co., Ltd. 2) General Manager of Dongying Delta Livestock Farm Co., Ltd 3) Deputy Chief of Zhuangxi Oil Production Plant of Sinopec Shengli Oilfield Branch 4) President of Guangrao Fishery Development Association 5) President of Guangrao Fishery Development Association	1	<b>Field interviews in YRE – Qingdao and Dongying (SSI)</b>  Date: Mon 31 Oct. 2022 (Qingdao):  Date Tues 01 – Wed. 02 Nov. 2022 (Dongying - Covid-19 clearance granted)  Date: Thurs 03 Nov. 2022 Return to homebase
<b>4. Secondary stakeholders (only indirectly or temporarily affected)</b>					
				3	Not prioritised in this MTR
<b>5. Stakeholders at grassroots level who do not benefit from the intervention (gender disaggregated where possible)</b>					
				3	Not prioritised in this MTR
<b>6. Other interest groups that are not participating directly in the intervention, e.g. UN/other agencies working in the area, civil-society orgs.</b>					
16/6	FAO-CN	Name: Chunsheng Yao  Position: GEF Portfolio Project Officer	Responsible for Project 052 - Piloting Provincial-Level Wetland PA System in Jiangxi Province	1	Date: Fri 14 Oct. 2022  Time: 15h00 / (UK) 08h00  <b>Zoom Meeting Link:</b> Meeting ID: 959 1358 7736 Passcode: 68483375
	Consultant on Wetland PAs	Name: Prof. Xue Dayuan (M) Position: Consultant	Responsible for formulating the Wetland PA Management Strategy in Jiangxi Province	2	Unavailable

	Private sector Dongying Kanghua Marine Technology Company	Name: Kan Rentao Position: Deputy General Manager	Mr Kan is responsible for developing eco-friendly production of mitten crab in the YRE as proposed in the Prodoc	1	Date: Wed. 02 Nov. 2022 (Conducted during the field visit to Dongying on 02 Nov. 2022)
	UNDP	Name: Not identified  Position:	UNDP and UNEP entered into a partnership agreement to support the implementation of the Regional Strategic Action Programme (SAP) in the South China Sea (supporting conservation of coastal lagoons, seagrass beds and coral reefs).	3	Date: ..... 2022 Time: ..... / ..... (UK)

	Confirmed/realised		Field visits confirmed/realised		Identifying names/dates		Not applicable/available
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## Appendix 4. MTR matrix applied to support and guide remote and field interviews of selected stakeholders

Eval Criteria / ToR No.	Questions & sub questions	Indicators and judgement criteria	Sources of information / summary of methods	Interviews - recorded response
<b>1.RELEVANCE - Are the project outcomes congruent with country priorities, GEF focal areas/operational programme strategies, the FAO Country Programming Framework and the needs and priorities of targeted beneficiaries ?</b>				
<b>1.1 Strategic relevance at national level</b>	<b>Question 1:</b> <i>Does the project continue to have a high level of strategic relevance among national partners (NFGA, FIO, Min of Finance, etc.)?</i>	1.1.1 Number of project outcomes that remain congruent with the needs of national partners. <b>Judgement criteria:</b> (a) Number of project outcomes and actions that support PRC's national priorities and policies concerning the conservation of estuarine biodiversity and its global environmental benefits; (b) Evidence that public and political support and funding for estuary biodiversity conservation and MPA networks is growing (c) Degree to which barriers that are compromising the project's relevance are being addressed (for example, level of inter-provincial cooperation, removal of policy overlaps (favouring economic development over conservation of estuarine biodiversity))	1) Prodoc 2) Aichi Target 11 3) National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) 4) National Development Plan 2015-2020 and 2021-2025 5) National sector policies, strategies and plans (forestry, agriculture, land use/environment, marine, etc.) 6) National statistics on forestry, carbon sinks, biodiversity 7) Theory of change 8) Interviews with central/provincial government stakeholders, education and research institutions, project staff, FAO/GEF-China	<b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:

<p><b>1.2 Sub-national relevance</b></p>	<p><b>Question 2:</b> <i>Does the project continue to respond to the needs of local stakeholders and communities who live in and around the project sites?</i></p>	<p>1.2.1 Number of project outcomes and actions that remain congruent with the needs and priorities of local partners at the provincial level  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>                  (a) Are the sub-national stakeholders engaged in the project's actions the right ones to deliver reforms and change in the project sites, or is there a need to include others?                  (b) Is the project applying an inclusive participatory approach?                  (c) Have needs analyses (of men, women and youths) been conducted and applied correctly?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Prodoc</li> <li>2) Aichi Target 11</li> <li>3) National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)</li> <li>4) National Development Plan 2015-2020 and 2021-2025</li> <li>5) National sector policies, strategies and plans (forestry, agriculture, land use/environment, marine, etc.)</li> <li>6) National statistics on forestry, carbon sinks, biodiversity</li> <li>7) Theory of change</li> <li>8) Interviews</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>                  1. Name/position:</p>
<p><b>1.3 (MTR) Alignment with GEF Priorities and FAO Strategic Objectives and Country Programming Framework</b></p>	<p><b>MTR to assess this from its document analysis</b></p>	<p>1.3.1 Level of alignment with GEF4 Priorities and FAO Strategic Objectives and Country Planning Framework  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>                  (a) Level to which project remains congruent with GEF4's BD-SP-2 (Increasing Representation of Effectively Managed MPAs in PA Systems) and BD-SP-4 (Strengthening the Policy and Regulatory Framework for Mainstreaming Biodiversity);                  (b) Level to which the projects supports FAO-SO2;</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Prodoc</li> <li>2) Aichi Target 11</li> <li>3) National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP)</li> <li>4) National Development Plan 2015-2020 and 2021-2025</li> <li>5) National sector policies, strategies and plans (forestry, agriculture, land use/environment, marine, etc.)</li> <li>6) National statistics on forestry, carbon sinks, biodiversity</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>                  1. Name/position:                  2. Name/position</p>

		(c) Evidence that the project remains congruent with FAO-CN's latest CPF 2021-2025?	7) Theory of change 8) Interviews	
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**2. EFFECTIVENESS - To what extent has the project delivered on its outputs, outcomes and objectives?**

<p><b>2.1 Component 1</b></p>	<p><b>Question 3 on component 1 - Policy, Planning and Institutional building:</b> <i>To what extent are the planned outputs delivered so far contributing to the achievement of expected outcome 1?</i></p> <p>Note: the MTR has reworked outcomes 1.1 to 1.3 in the ToC as follows: <b>a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework to restore, conserve and sustainably use estuarine ecosystems in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces is applied by main stakeholders, in line with GEF/FAO priorities and the objectives of ecological civilisation in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)</b></p>	<p>2.1.1 Number of outputs delivered to a satisfactory standard under component 1</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Degree to which one or more ecological compensation mechanisms for estuarine biodiversity conservation have been established in the participating provinces</p> <p>b) Degree to which Strategic EIA has been completed in conformity with international standards and been successfully applied in sector development plans in Dongying and Zhuhai cities (respecting biodiversity conservation in Yellow and Pearl River estuaries).</p> <p>c) Degree to which draft local regulations supporting creation of MPA networks meet international standards and respond to local needs to be officially adopted by local partners.</p> <p>d) Degree to which long-term MPA integrated management and networking plans meet the needs of local partners to ensure they can be implemented at both project sites</p> <p>e) Level of progress in finalising and adopting medium/long-term restoration strategies for both estuarine ecosystems for YRE and PRE</p> <p>f) Level of progress in the development and adoption of two long-term ecological health monitoring plans and protocols</p> <p>g) How far are Shandong and Guangdong Prov. gov. successfully applying institutional coordination mechanisms to address conflicts and oversee coord. Mechanisms in place</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)</li> <li>2) BTO reports</li> <li>3) Ecological compensation mechanism documents</li> <li>4) SEIA Report and sector plans for Dongying and Zhuhai Cities</li> <li>5) Local Regulations on Marine Protected Area Network Management Plans and restoration strategies</li> <li>6) Reports on ecosystem health monitoring (METT/Ecosystem Health Index reports if available)</li> <li>7) Interviews with provincial/county staff working with the project</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name/position:</li> <li>2. Name/position</li> </ol>
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		<p>h) What are the lessons learnt so far (includes any unintended consequences)?</p>		
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<p><b>2.2 Component 2</b></p>	<p><b>Question 4 on component 2 - MPA networking and wetland restoration:</b> <i>To what extent are the outputs delivered so far contributing to the achievement of expected outcome 2?</i>  <b>Note:</b> the MTR has reworked outcomes 2.1 to 2.3 in the ToC as follows: <b>Effective co-management of MPA networks in the YRE and PRE leads to the stabilisation and/or increase in their ecological goods and services over time (includes counts of fish eggs, fish larvae, migratory birds, carbon storage, flood prevention, etc.).</b></p>	<p>2.2.1 Number of outputs delivered to a satisfactory standard under component 2:  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Quality of the biodiversity conservation gap analysis and ecological connectivity strategy conducted  b) Number of MPAs that have successfully updated their management plans, acquired new monitoring and surveillance equipment and trained staff on applying co-management approaches and sustainable funding initiatives.  c) Number of MPAs that are participating in MPA network coordination mechanisms:  d) Number of new provincial level MPAs in the process of being adopted  e) Number of hectares of wetland habitats restored to international standards in Yellow River (specify grass wetlands in relation to other habitats)  e) Number of hectares of mangroves restored to international standards in Pearl River (including removal of mariculture facilities)  f) Degree to which there is evidence at this stage of: (i) improved ecological health/METT scores; (ii) increase in fish egg and larva; (iii) increase in the number of migratory birds (especially Oriental White Stork).  g) Lessons learnt from the implementation of outputs under component 2 (includes any unintended consequences).</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)</li> <li>2) BTO reports</li> <li>3) Gap analysis reports</li> <li>4) MPA Management plans</li> <li>5) Monitoring data on eco-health index/METT scores;</li> <li>5) Co-management agreements;</li> <li>6) Training manuals and documents</li> <li>7) Interviews with stakeholders and local beneficiaries at provincial level on MPA planning, management and regulatory practices.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>2.3 Component 3</b></p>	<p><b>Question 5 on component 3 - Threat analysis, mitigation and monitoring:</b> <i>To what extent are the outputs delivered so far contributing to the achievement of expected outcome 3?</i>  <b>Note:</b> the MTR has reworked outcomes 3.1 to 3.4 in the ToC as follows:  <b>YRE &amp; PRE register a net rise in public investment dedicated to restoring, conserving and promoting the sustainable use of their ecological goods and services, aided by new data to support informed decision-making on where to target funds</b></p>	<p>2.3.1 Number of outputs delivered to a satisfactory standard under component 3:  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Quality of the threats analysis to the ecological health of the two estuarine ecosystems;  b) Degree to which investment strategies have been developed and integrated into municipal 5-Year Development Plans to address the main threats identified (13th, 14th and 15th Plans)  b) Degree of progress in identifying and developing sustainable eco-goods and services that generate local income, while at the same time, reduce stress on critical estuarine habitats such as: (i) eco-farming of mitten crab in the Yellow River Estuary; (ii) ecotourism, (iii) ecological compensation agreements, (iv) park rangers in the Hengqin Marine Park in the Pearl River Estuary  c) Number of village conservation groups officially created and supporting the co-management process in Shandong Province (target: 5 villages) and Guangdong Province (target: 1 village);  d) Number of people from local communities participating as volunteers in MPA activities including monitoring (target 500 volunteers).  e) Lessons learnt from the implementation of outputs under component 3 (includes any unintended consequences).</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR)  2) BTO reports;  3) Threat analysis reports  4) 5-Year Provincial (and county) Plans  5) Reports on economic activities promoted;  6) M&amp;E data  5) Interviews with stakeholders at national, provincial and local levels who participate in the networking</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>2.4 Component 4</b></p>	<p><b>Question 6 on component 4 - Capacity Building and Increasing Environmental Awareness:</b> <i>To what extent are the outputs delivered so far contributing to the achievement of expected outcome 4?</i></p> <p>Note: the MTR has reworked outcomes 4.1 to 4.2 in the ToC as follows:  <b>The number of people/civil society organisations participating to protect, restore, conserve, monitor and sustainably use the ecological goods and services of YRE and PRE increases each year from 2021.</b></p>	<p>2.4.1 Number of outputs delivered to a satisfactory standard under component 4:</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Degree to which senior officials and technical staff have been trained in ecosystem-based principles have supported the development of informed-decision-making governing the planning, management and regulation of the two estuarine ecosystems of the project.</p> <p>b) Degree to which community-based volunteer networks have been trained (in China and abroad) to participate in the planning, management and regulation of the two estuarine ecosystems (includes bird and dolphin counting, mangrove surveillance, etc.</p> <p>c) Degree to which local schools (teachers and students) have participated in awareness raising exercises on the ecological goods and services of estuarine ecosystems (target: 100 students/year).</p> <p>d) Number of publicity campaigns conducted with the support of volunteers and decision makers (target: 500 volunteers and 20 decision-makers)</p> <p>e) Degree to which the number of warnings and arrests issued for illegal practices in the project sites has decreased/increased on an annual basis since 2019.</p> <p>f) Lessons learnt from the implementation of outputs under component 4</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</p> <p>2) Project training materials, publications, promotions, education campaigns, newsletters and website;</p> <p>3) Interviews with government and community representatives engaged in the capacity building exercises and awareness raising</p> <p>4) Level of perception of other government agencies (Agriculture, Housing, Industry), the wider community and mass media on the needs of estuarine ecosystems.</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <p>1. Name/position:</p> <p>2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>2.5 Component 5</b></p>	<p><b>Question 7 on component 5 - Project management, M&amp;E and replication of project results:</b> <i>To what extent are the outputs delivered so far contributing to the achievement of expected outcome 5?</i>  <b>Note:</b> the MTR has reworked outcomes 5.1 to 5.3 in the ToC:  <b>The project's M&amp;E system guides national and sub-national partners at both project sites on the development of their own M&amp;E systems to support the achievement of outcome 1-4 above.</b></p>	<p>2.5.1 Number of outputs delivered to a satisfactory standard under component 5:  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Degree to which the project has established an effective M&amp;E system (based on quantitative and qualitative indicators) and shares data with other relevant GEF-funded projects (such as project 052)  b) Degree to which government agencies have established their own M&amp;E systems to support the planning, management and regulation of the two estuarine ecosystems (includes collection of data from volunteer groups on bird and dolphin counting, mangrove surveillance, number of illegal activities reported, etc.)  c) Degree to which lessons learned and good practices are being fed back into the decision-making process.  d) Lessons learnt from the implementation of M&amp;E under component 5 (includes any unintended consequences)</p>	<p>1) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);  2) M&amp;E reports  3) Interviews of project staff, government M&amp;E staff and volunteer groups</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<b>3. EFFICIENCY - To what extent has the project been implemented efficiently and cost effectively?</b>				

<p><b>3.1 Management - timeliness of operations</b></p>	<p><b>Question 8 on the delivery of activities in a timely manner as planned:</b> <i>To what extent has the project been able to deliver its planned outputs on time (in line with the Prodoc/annual work plans)?</i></p>	<p>3.1.1 Percentage of planned outputs and activities delivered on time and in line with work plans and budget.  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Number of activities and outputs under Components 1-4 that have been completed to date (to 30 September 2020)  Degree to which the project's main stakeholders are satisfied with the activities and outputs realised so far;  b) Degree to which delays caused by external events such as the Government reshuffle in 2018, the Covid-19 pandemic, weather events, bureaucracy, etc. have had an impact on implementation;  c) Degree to which the project implementation mechanism has adapted to external challenges (such as the government reshuffle, the pandemic, weather events, etc.) to improve project implementation</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans  2) PIRs/PPRs  3) Project technical and financial reports  4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>3.2 Management - expenditure rates</b></p>	<p><b>Question 9 on GEF funding and co-finance:</b> <i>To what extent has the project been able to deliver its planned activities and outputs according to the budget allocated from GEF funding and co-finance sources?</i></p>	<p>3.2.1 Level of expenditure of GEF and co-finance funds against planned expenditure to 30/09/2022. <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which annual expenditure rates of GEF funds (overall and by component) meet planned expenditure rates? b) Degree to which co-financing has contributed to the project outputs and outcomes as a percentage of total expenditure of GEF funds (Overall and by component) c) Factors that facilitate/affect the disbursement of GEF funds and co-finance - (<b>link to section 5</b>)</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
<p><b>3.3 Cost-effectiveness</b></p>	<p><b>Question 10 on cost-effectiveness:</b> <i>Is the project achieving a satisfactory level of cost-effectiveness (i.e. conversion of resources into results) compared to similar projects?</i></p>	<p>3.3.1. Level of cost-effectiveness achieved to 30/09/2022 compared to other relevant GEF-funded projects implemented with the support of UN agencies (especially Project 052) <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Number of direct beneficiaries recorded compared to total GEF expenditure to 30/09/2022 (average cost of supporting each direct beneficiary/household)? b) Degree to which GEF funds have leveraged co-finance (expressed as a ratio) c) Main factors that have contributed to/affected cost-effectiveness (in particular relating to the latest Execution Agreement, initiatives on data sharing, synergies and complementarities with other projects that operate/do not operate to avoid/increase the duplication of resources) <b>Link to section 5 - Factors Affecting Performance)</b></p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews 5) MTR reports for GEF-funded projects supporting wetlands and river biodiversity conservation (projects 052 and 057)</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>

<b>4. SUSTAINABILITY - What is the likelihood that the project results will be useful or persist after the end of the project?</b>				
<b>4.1 Risks and barriers</b>	<b>Question 11 on risks to sustainability of the project's outputs and outcomes:</b> <i>What are the key risks that may affect the sustainability of the project's results and their benefits (in particular, financial, socioeconomic, institutional, governance and environmental-related risks identified in the Prodoc)?</i>	4.1.1. Number, type and category of risks that threaten the sustainability of the project's main outputs and outcomes. <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which risk rankings in the Prodoc and PIRs are still accurate b) Degree to which the risk management strategy of the project is applying effective mitigation measures to remove main risks, or reduce them to "low" risk status. c) Degree to which institutional arrangements and any cross-sector partnerships established can be sustained and risks managed from 2023..	1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews	<b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:  2. Name/position
<b>4.2 Scaling up of results and good practices in the participating provinces</b>	<b>Question 12 on scaling up:</b> <i>What project results, good practices or experiences have been scaled up in the same geographic area of the two project sites using government and/or non-government resources? (Yellow and Pearl River estuaries covered by Shandong and Guangdong Provinces)</i>	4.2.1 Number of activities/outputs that have been scaled up by local stakeholders <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which local government stakeholders have invested their own resources into scaling up exercises in the Yellow and Pearl River estuaries compared to GEF funding; b) Degree to which non-government stakeholders (including volunteer groups) are scaling up restoration/conservation actions and/or sustainable economic activities.	1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews	

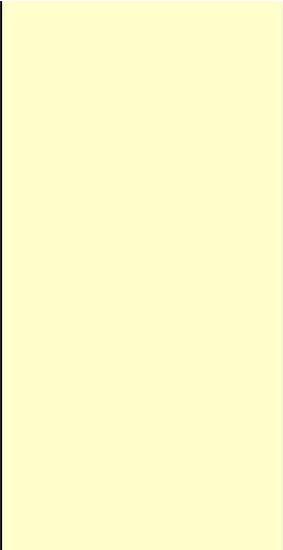
<p><b>4.3</b> <b>Replication of project results and good practices outside the participating provinces</b></p>	<p><b>Question 13 on replication:</b> <i>What project results, good practices or experiences have been replicated outside the geographic area of the two project sites using government and/or non-government resources?</i></p>	<p>4.2.1 Number of activities/outputs that have been scaled up by local stakeholders <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which national government stakeholders are replicating/will replicate project outputs and good practices beyond the Yellow and Pearl River estuaries; b) Degree to which non-government stakeholders (including volunteer groups) are replicating/will replicate wetland restoration/conservation actions and/or sustainable economic activities promoted by the project elsewhere in China c) Degree to which other GEF-funded projects in China (and other countries) are replicating good practices from project 045</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews</p>	
<p><b>4.4</b> <b>Exit Strategy</b></p>	<p><b>Question 14 on the exit strategy:</b> <i>Has the exit strategy been identified in the project design, or during implementation so far, to clarify how all resources and materials will be transferred to stakeholders?</i></p>	<p>5.3.1 Exit strategy has been identified <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which the Prodoc and work plans show evidence of an exit strategy; b) Degree to which the PSC, OPIM and FAO-China have discussed the exit strategy and incorporated it in work plans from 2022; c) Degree to which local stakeholders are aware of the exit strategy</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position: 2. Name/position</p>
<p><b>5 FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE - Are there any barriers or other risks that may prevent future progress towards and the achievement of the project's longer-term objectives?</b></p>				

<p><b>5.1 Project design</b></p>	<p><b>Question 15 on project design and readiness:</b> <i>To what extent has the project design affected the delivery of its expected outputs, outcomes and objectives?</i></p>	<p>1.5.1 Number of delays in implementation (measured in work/days) caused by the project design not being suited to the current needs of implementing partners</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Degree to which the project has experienced delays because the Execution Agreement and implementing mechanism had to be modified to ensure project can be implemented as planned.</p> <p>b) Degree to which the causal logic of the project's outputs and outcomes is no longer relevant to meet the current needs and policies of the government and/or local stakeholders</p> <p>c) Degree to which the timeframe for the implementation of the project's main outputs and outcomes has had to be extended and whether the current timeframe still available for implementation (to Feb. 2023) is sufficient.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Prodoc and annual work plans</li> <li>2) PIRs/PPRs</li> <li>3) Project technical and financial reports</li> <li>4) Interviews</li> <li>5) Relevant government policies, strategies and plans</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name/position:</li> <li>2. Name/position</li> </ol>
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<p><b>5.2 (a) Quality of project execution and management</b></p>	<p><b>Question 16 (a) on the adoption of the OPIM modality:</b> <i>To what extent has the executing agency discharged its role and responsibilities on the management and administration of the project to a satisfactory level?</i></p>	<p>5.2.1 Level of satisfaction on the quality of the project's execution before and after the introduction of OPIM  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Degree of satisfaction on the PSC's role in guiding the planning, implementation, co-funding, monitoring and learning aspects of project.  b) Degree to which the PMO has: (i) the resources, (ii) the technical and administrative capacity to discharge its role to a satisfactory level (highlight main challenges, if any).  c) How far is the executing agency and PSC ensuring the project has the human resources to carry out project duties in an effective and timely manner (including reimbursement payments)?  d) Has the Operational Partner's Agreement been applied efficiently and have any LoAs been agreed to facilitate project implementation?</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans  2) PIRs/PPRs  3) Project technical and financial reports  4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>5.2 (b)</b> <b>Long-term ownership</b></p>	<p><b>Question 16 (b) on future operations:</b> Has the OPIM modality had a positive, or negative effect on the establishment of sustainable institutional arrangements and cross-sector partnerships at the national, provincial and local levels to scale up project outputs and outcomes?</p>	<p>5.2.2 Degree to which main stakeholders can continue to operate project outputs and sustain outcomes <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Mechanisms are in place to continue the OPIM modality and partnerships with other government, international institutions and civil organisations beyond project closure; b) Funding and support is in place to support consolidation of project’s actions/results;; c) capacity of gov. institutions to upscale good practices from the project; d) stakeholders have identified how the communication strategy will continue; e) Internal capacity of CSOs to continue its participation is evident.</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
<p><b>5.3</b> <b>Risk management</b></p>	<p><b>Question 17 on risk management:</b> <i>How well have risks been identified and managed?</i></p>	<p>5.3.1 Level of risk management integrated into project planning, implementation and monitoring <b>Judgement criteria:</b> a) Degree to which external and internal risks are reviewed in the planning, implementation and monitoring process by the PMO and PSC and mitigation measures updated to reduce delays/enhance implementation as planned b) Degree to which risk mitigation measures applied have improved execution and created good practice c) Degree to which risk mitigation measures applied have had unintended positive or negative results on project implementation</p>	<p>1) Prodoc and annual work plans 2) PIRs/PPRs 3) Project technical and financial reports 4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b> 1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>

<p><b>5.4 FAO support and services</b></p>	<p><b>Question 18 on FAO support:</b> <i>To what extent has FAO's support and services (oversight, supervision, backstopping, procurement services, etc.) reduced/caused delays in the project's identification, formulation, approval, start-up and execution?</i></p>	<p>5.4.1 Number of cases where interviewees confirm FAO support and services have improved/slowed down implementation levels:  <b>Judgement criteria:</b>  a) Perception of main stakeholders (NFGA/PMO and Provincial Governments) on the quality and timeliness of FAO's administrative and technical support from FAO-CN, FAO-RAP, FAO-Rome and other FAO offices;  b) General perception of local stakeholders (in the counties/project sites) on the quality and timeliness of FAO's administrative and technical support from FAO staff in general;  c) Perception of FAO staff from FAO-CN, FAO-RAP, FAO-Rome and other FAO offices on where they can improve their services and enhance the added-value of FAO;</p>	<p>1) Prodoc, Progress and annual reports;  2) Interviews  3) Online questionnaire (to be confirmed)</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b>  1. Name/position:  2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>5.5 Financial needs</b></p>	<p><b>Question 19 on the amount of co-finance available:</b> <i>To what extent have GEF funds and the co-finance pledged been delivered on time and in the amount planned?</i></p>	<p>5.5.1 Level of co-finance provided against pledges</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Degree to which the slow delivery or lack of adequate GEF-funding has affected performance</li> <li>b) Degree to which the slow delivery or lack of adequate co-finance has affected performance</li> <li>c) Degree to which GEF funding and/or pledged co-finance has leveraged additional funding support (from other donors or co-financing sources) that has improved/affected performance</li> </ul>	
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<p><b>5.6 Coordination and partnerships</b></p>	<p><b>Question 20 on partnerships and stakeholder engagement:</b> <i>To what extent have main stakeholders been involved in project formulation and implementation and benefitted from the project's activities and results?</i></p>	<p>5.6.1 Number of government staff, members of civil society and private sector representatives who have participated in project design and/or implementation and who have directly benefitted from its results and outcomes</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Number of partnerships established with government, non-government and private sector actors that confirm their active participation in project design/implementation has led to them reaping direct benefits in terms of capacity building, resource mobilisation, learning, etc. (includes disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and people with disabilities);</p> <p>b) Number of partnerships and synergies with other GEF-funded projects (such as those mentioned in the Prodoc), that have had a positive/negative effect on project performance;</p> <p>c) Number of partnerships with other UN agency and donor-funded projects that have had a positive/negative effect on project performance (such as Sino-German initiatives, UNDP, WWF)</p> <p>d) Lessons learned on how different stakeholder groups see the mechanisms of their involvement could be improved to strengthen project partnerships going forward</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Progress reports 3) Interviews 4) Online reports from other relevant projects operating in China, or which have been concluded since 2020.</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <p>1. Name/position:</p> <p>2. Name/position</p>
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<p><b>5.7 M&amp;E &amp; communications</b></p>	<p><b>Question 21:</b> <i>Is the project's M&amp;E system supporting the development of an effective communication strategy to support: (i) learning on project results, (ii) promote the up-scaling/replication of good practices linked to the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of wetland ecological goods and services; (iii) the development of informed decision-making?</i></p>	<p>5.7.1 Number of cases where the M&amp;E system is directly supporting learning, awareness raising on the ecological goods and services of estuarine ecosystems and supporting the development of informed decision-making at all levels</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Perception of stakeholders of the M&amp;E system being applied and any gaps in the data being collected to support the meeting project outcomes and objectives;</p> <p>b) Degree to which the project collects qualitative data to support reflexion seminars on how to improve performance;</p> <p>c) Degree to which the M&amp;E findings are being fed into the project's communication strategy</p> <p>d) Perception of stakeholders on how communication products and activities could be improved to support gender equality and the sustainability and scaling up/replication of project results and good practices;</p> <p>e) Degree to which the project shares data with other relevant GEF-funded projects (such as project 052)</p> <p>f) Degree to which government agencies will continue the project's M&amp;E system within their internal monitoring facilities to support the planning, management and regulation of the two estuarine ecosystems (includes collection of data from volunteer groups on bird and dolphin counting, mangrove surveillance, number of illegal activities reported, etc.)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Prodoc</li> <li>2) Progress reports (PIR/PPR);</li> <li>3) Project publications, promotions, education campaigns, newsletters and website;</li> <li>4) Interviews with stakeholders and local community reps. working in the project sites</li> <li>5) Level of perception of the wider needs of wetland habitats and their ecosystems among development sectors.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name/position:</li> <li>2. Name/position</li> </ol>
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		<p>g) Lessons learnt from the implementation of M&amp;E under component 5 (includes any unintended consequences)</p>		
<p><b>6. Cross-cutting priorities: To what extent have gender, environmental and social priorities been taken in designing and implementing the project?</b></p>				

<p><b>6.1 Gender &amp; ethnic minorities</b></p>	<p><b>Question 22:</b> <i>To what has gender equality been fully integrated into designing and implementing the project's main activities in YRE and PRE?</i></p>	<p>6.1.1 Number of women, youths, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups who have participated actively in the project's planning and implementation in line with GEF and FAO policies and guidelines</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Evidence of gender analysis and FPIC in the design and its incorporation in the project design and M&amp;E system (includes sex-disaggregated baselines, indicators and targets)</p> <p>b) Degree to which staff in the PMO and in the field have gender sensitive skills to ensure women, youths and other disadvantaged groups participate in project planning and implementation decision-making and have access to M&amp;E data and communications;</p> <p>c) Perception of women, youths and other disadvantaged groups interviewed on their level of access to information, training, resources, etc.</p> <p>d) Number of women and other disadvantaged groups who have assumed leadership roles in co-management partnerships and economic activities promoted in the two project sites;</p> <p>e) Lessons learned and good practices identified (including any unexpected positive/negative developments) regarding the project's socially inclusive approach applied</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Prodoc</li> <li>2) Work plans;</li> <li>3) Technical, training and workshop reports;</li> <li>4) Assess M&amp;E system</li> <li>5) FAO/GEF Gender objectives and guidance documents</li> <li>6) Group and individual online/in person interviews with women, youth and other disadvantaged groups</li> </ol>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name/position:</li> <li>2. Name/position</li> </ol>
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<p><b>6.2 Environmental and social safeguards</b></p>	<p>MTR assessment only on the ESS checklist</p>	<p>6.2.1 How far is the project still applying the ESS (in particular relating to biodiversity conservation within the wider context of sustaining the wetland ecosystem)?</p> <p><b>Judgement criteria:</b></p> <p>a) Assess level of consistency with ESS</p> <p>b) Level of integration of the ecosystem approach in the projects main activities at provincial level (sustainable use of biodiversity is fully applied)</p> <p>c) Views of locals on their ability to manage immediate needs with long-term sustainability of endangered biodiversity</p>	<p>1) Prodoc 2) Work plans; 3) Biodiversity monitoring reports; 4) Interviews</p>	<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <p>1. Name/position:</p> <p>2. Name/position</p>
<p><b>7. Lessons and good practices: Are there lessons learnt, or good practices identified to support GEF/FAO guide future projects planned in China and elsewhere?</b></p>				
<p><b>7.1 Lessons and good practices</b></p>	<p><b>Question 23:</b> <i>Are there any lessons you have learned, or good practices that the MTR should consider to support its recommendations on improving the project's relevance, performance and/or potential impact?</i></p>	<p>Open question for main stakeholders and beneficiaries</p>		<p><b>Responses of interviewees:</b></p> <p>1. Name/position:</p> <p>2. Name/position</p>

## Appendix 5. List of documents consulted

### Documents consulted that are not available on the internet

**FAO/GEF.** Project Document GCP/CPR/045/GFF, GEF CEO endorsement, 22 Feb. 2013.

**SOA/FAO.** Execution Agreement, 12 June 2017.

**SOA/FAO.** Execution Agreement, Amendment No. 1, 12 April 2018.

**SOA/FAO.** Execution Agreement, Amendment No. 2, 28 January 2018.

**SOA/FAO.** Execution Agreement, Amendment No. 3, 12 April 2021.

**SOA/PMO.** Project Implementation Reports No. 1 (2018-2019), 2 (2019-2020),

**FIO/PMO.** Project Implementation Reports No. 3 (2020-2021), 4 (2021-2022)

**SOA/PMO.** Project Progress Report 1, (June 2017 to June 2020)

**FIO/PMO.** Project Progress Reports 2, (June 2020), 3 (Dec. 2020), 4 (June 2021), 5 (Dec. 2021).

**FIO/PMO.** Self-Evaluation Report (October 2020).

**FIO/PMO.** Reports summaries of activities under Components 1 to 4, 2020-2022.

**FIO/PMO.** PowerPoint Presentation of the Project, October 2022.

**FIO/PMO.** GEF Biodiversity Tracking Tool for all 11 MPAs, March 2021

**FIO/PMO.** Species List of the Yellow River Estuary, Oct. 2022

**FIO/PMO.** List of relevant policies, Oct. 2022

#### **FIO/PMO. Consultant Reports (abstracts in English):**

1. Report on the Analysis of Environmental Policy in Overall Dev. Planning of Shandong Province.
2. Regulation on the Abandoned Oil Well in Shandong Project Area (Draft).
3. Study on Strategic Environmental Assessment and Local Policy Draft in Shandong Project Area.
4. Report on the Study of MPAs Law and Local Policy Draft.
5. Study Report on the Integrating and Networking Strategies for MPAs (Shandong).
6. Measures on Ecological Compensation for Nature Reserves in Shandong Province (Draft).
7. Report on the Study of Assessment Methods for MPA in Shandong Project Area.
8. Comprehensive Management and Networking Strategy of Five PAs in the Pearl River Estuary.
9. Report on the Resolutions of Conflicts with Adverse Ecological Impacts in the Estuary of Pearl River.
10. Protection Strategy and Measures for the Chinese White Dolphin in the Pearl RE (Draft).

11. Monitoring Survey Report of MPA in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  12. Report on the Research of MPA Monitoring in Shandong Project Area.
  13. Report on the Dynamic study of Monitoring Index of MPAs in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  14. Report on the Monitoring Index System of MPAs in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  15. Ecosystem Monitoring Plan of MPA in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  16. Ecological System Analysis and Monitoring Plan in the Estuary of the Pearl River.
  17. Report on Population Status, Main Threats and Protection Progress of Chinese White Dolphin in the Pearl River Estuary.
  18. Minutes of Consulting Meeting on MPAs in Shandong Project.
  19. Final Report on the Development and Application of Geographic Information System (GIS) in the Estuaries of Pearl River and Yellow River.
  20. METT Assessment Report of Six Marine Protected Area in the Estuary of Yellow River.
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  26. Assessment of the Landscape and Land Use Change in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  27. Information Sharing Report on the Landscape and Land Use Change of MPA in the YRE.
  28. Analysis and Research on Marine Ecological Restoration in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  29. Assessment of Marine Ecosystem Services and Restoration in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  30. Investment Analysis of Marine Ecological Restoration in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  31. Report on the Study of Remediation of Marine Wetland in the Estuary of Yellow River.
  32. Report on the Marine Ecological Compensation and Restoration in the Estuary of Yellow River.
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## Appendix 6: Results matrix at 30 September 2022 with MTR ratings & observations\*

Results Chain	Indicators*	Baseline (2017)**	Progress to to 30/09/2022	End of project targets to 04/02/2023*	Achievement rating (HS, S, MS, MU, U, HU)	Justification for rating and observations
<b>Component 1</b>	<b>Policy, Planning &amp; Institutional Strengthening</b>					
<b>Outcome 1</b>	Outcomes 1.1 to 1.3 in the Prodoc of 2013 have been updated in the ToC as follows: <b><i>A new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework to restore, conserve and sustainably use estuarine ecosystems in Shandong and Guangdong Provinces is applied by main stakeholders, in line with GEF/FAO priorities and the objectives of ecological civilisation in the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025).</i></b>					
<b>Output 1.1</b> Establishment of an ecological compensation mechanism(s) for biodiversity conservation at local levels.	Number of mechanisms adopted and applied;  Amount of ecological compensation paid out to restore and conserve estuarine habitats and their biodiversity by 2023.	No local ecological compensation mechanism in place in PRE and only interim measures in place in the YRE (since 2019).	Gap analysis on biodiversity conservation in the YRE completed and used to support identification of the ecological connectivity needs of the new National Park Planned for YRE.  No gap analysis yet in PRE; Training on applying eco-compensation and restoration in the PRE has been completed;  Plan for eco-compensation and high-quality dev. of MPAs in Guangdong Province adopted on 16/02/2022.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities have mechanisms and plans in place for ecological compensation;</li> <li>Both municipalities demonstrate ecological compensation in support of biodiversity conservation has increased between 2017 and 2025;</li> </ul>	<b>HS</b>	<p><b>Progress in achieving Outcome 1:</b></p> <p>New policy and regulatory framework for eco-compensation in place in PRE and progressing in the YRE where it will be applied to support the development of the new National Park rather than the MPA network foreseen in the Prodoc.</p> <p>Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities and expected to apply new eco-compensation plans from 2023. Ecological protection has already been integrated into the marine economy sections of: (i) Shandong Province's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (issued Oct. 2021); (ii) Guangdong Province's 14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan; (iii) Zhuhai City 14th Five-Year Plan; (iv)</p>

			Plan for eco-compensation and high-quality dev. of MPAs in Shandong Prov. still ongoing to replace Interim Measures.			14 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan for Dongying City; (v) Dongying's Outline of the Vision Plan for 2035.
<b>Output 1.2</b> Strategic EIA applied to economic development sector's plans and programs in Dongying City (Yellow River) and Zhuhai City (Pearl River).	No. of SEIA/EIA regulations adopted by 2023;  No. of economic sector development plans applying SEIA in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities by 2025.	No economic sectors are applying SEIA in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities	SEIA study in the YRE and analysis of environmental policies in Shandong Prov. have been completed.  New SEIA/EIA regulations adopted in Shandong Prov. on 03/12/2021.  SEIA study in the PRE is still ongoing and planned to be completed by end of 2022. Finalisation and adoption of regulations on SEIA/EIA in Zhuhai municipality is planned for 2023.	Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities have a new policy and regulatory framework in place for the application of SEIA and EIA in economic development sector planning in line with national laws and regulations on EIA.  There is evidence that high impact sectors from the threat analyses (includes agriculture, fisheries, industrial, housing and transport sectors) have applied SEIA in their sector policies, strategies and plans in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities.	<b>HS</b>	New SEIA/EIA regulatory framework adopted in Shandong Province in line with national policies and laws on SEIA/EIA;  Dongying municipality has started training on applying SEIA/EIA in economic development sector plans and programmes.  Economic sectors in the YRE still need more training to apply SEIA/EIA as a tool to ensure their policies, strategies and plans respect the marine biodiversity conservation in the new National Park of the YRE;  Zhuhai municipality is committed to introducing regulatory framework for SEIA/EIA to protect biodiversity in the MPA network from 2023.
<b>Output 1.3</b> Draft local regulations in support of	No. of framework regulations supporting the restoration, conservation and	No local regulations on creating MPA networks are available	MoUs signed and protocols agreed to share information, ecological monitoring data and coordinate law	Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities have adopted two framework regulations governing the creation and	<b>HS</b>	MOUs and protocols on information sharing in place.  MPA management teams aware of the benefits of sharing information and data to support the

<p>creation of MPA networks.</p>	<p>sustainable use of MPA networks adopted by 2023;</p> <p>No. of MPAs that have updated their internal regulations to support the restoration, conservation and sustainable use of their MPA network in the PRE and YRE by 2024.</p>		<p>enforcement in the MPA networks of the PRE and YRE;</p> <p>Workshops have been concluded and draft regulations produced on how the MPA networks are to operate in the PRE and YRE.</p> <p>Regulations are under review by the PEC and main stakeholders. Their adoption is planned by the end of 2022.</p>	<p>development of the MPA networks in PRE and YRE;</p> <p>All 11 MPAs have updated their internal regulations to support the development of MPA networks in PRE and YRE.</p> <p>FIO/NFGA have integrated the MPA networking approach as an integral part of their national policies and regulations to support the development of new MPA networks in China</p>		<p>development of new management, social and ecological networks in the PRE and the YRE National Park.</p> <p>Platform for data sharing needs strengthening (cross-checked with Output 1.7).</p> <p>Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities are committed to adopting regulations to define official creation of the MPA network in the PRE and National Park in the YRE.</p>
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<p><b>Output 1.4</b> Preparation of long-term MPA integrated management and networking plans developed.</p>	<p>No. of framework plans adopted to develop integrated MPA networks by 2023;  No. of MPAs that fully integrate these framework plans in their own MPA management plans by 2024 (linked to first indicator for Output 2.2)</p>	<p>No long-term integrated management and networking plans available in the PRE or YRE</p>	<p>Latest METT tool applied in 2021 to compare new scores against baselines on management capacity in all 11 MPAs;  Drafts of the long-term framework plans to develop the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE have been prepared and are currently under review by the PEC and main stakeholders.</p>	<p>Two MPA integrated management and networking plans adopted.</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Both Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities are committed to adopting long-term management and networking framework plans for the MPA network in the PRE and for the YRE National Park in 2023.;</p> <p>Capacity building has started in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities on drafting these framework plans supported by the METT assessments and gap analysis conducted in YRE;</p> <p>The development of the framework plan for the YRE will need to be upgraded to a framework plan for the YRE National Park to save resources on creating/ updating of MPA management plans to develop the ecological connectivity planned in the Prodoc);</p> <p>Challenges for PRE: (i) no gap analysis so far; (ii) MPAs should have management plans to implement the framework plan (masterplan), but this not mandatory by law, (iii) application of eco-compensation (Output 1.1), long-term restoration (Output 1.5) and ecosystem health monitoring (Output 1.6) is unclear if MPAs lack their own management plan.</p>
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<p><b>Output 1.5</b> Development of medium to long-term restoration strategies for estuarine ecosystems</p>	<p>No. of long-term strategies adopted by 2023;  No. of MPAs that have integrated the strategy into their management plans.</p>	<p>No specific strategies to conserve estuarine ecosystems are available</p>	<p>Reports on the long-term restoration strategies for the YRE have been presented on: (i) analysis and research on marine ecological restoration in the YRE (2021); (ii) assessment of marine ecosystem services and restoration in the YRE (2021); (iii) investment analysis of marine ecological restoration in the YRE (2022); (iv) remediation of marine wetlands in the YRE and (v) Report on ecological compensation and restoration in the YRE (2022);  Similar reports have been prepared for the PRE, but need to be reviewed at the next PSC meeting, before the strategy can be finalized and adopted.</p>	<p>Two medium-to long-term restoration strategies adopted and applied</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Development of long-term restoration strategies are progressing well and expected to be adopted by Dongying municipality for the YRE by end of 2022 and by Zhuhai municipality for PRE in 2023.  More capacity building will be needed to expand the strategy to cover the new National Park in the YRE (Dongying) and on aligning the PRE framework management plans (Output 1.4) with the long-term restoration strategy (to support its adoption by decision-makers in Zhuhai municipality).</p>
<p><b>Output 1.6</b> Medium to long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans and protocols developed</p>	<p>No. of MPAs with long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans in place and sharing data within their respective MPA network.</p>	<p>No ecosystem health monitoring plans are available</p>	<p>MoUs signed and protocols agreed to share data on ecological monitoring in the PRE and YRE (see also Output 1.3);  Two ecosystem health monitoring plans completed in in March 2022</p>	<p>PRE and YRE MPA networks have established a platform to track their long-term ecosystem health monitoring plans and support informed decision-making on how to restore, conserve and</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Estuarine ecosystem health monitoring plans have been completed.  More training is needed to (i) demonstrate how the eco-health monitoring will support decision-making (cross-checked with Outputs 1.4 and 2.2), (ii) develop the cross-sector monitoring with key sectors</p>

			for Shandong and in Dec. 2021 for Guangdong); Dongying municipality has started to implement the plan since August 2022; Zhuhai monitoring plan is planned to start in the PRE in 2023 after review by the next PSC meeting.	sustainably use their shared estuarine ecosystems.		that have an impact on the PRE and YRE (cross-checked with Output 3.4); (iii) demonstrate how volunteer networks and other civil society groups can support specific parts of the ecological health monitoring process, law enforcement, etc. (cross-checked with Output 3.3).
<b>Output 3.4 (more relevant to Component 1)</b> Multi-agency, integrated monitoring plan developed and implemented in the PRE and YRE	No. of MOUs and supporting protocols to share data on and annual meetings and minutes	No multi-agency monitoring plan available	Draft monitoring plans are being identified for the PRE and YRE.	2 MOUs and supporting protocols agreed and operating to allow for the collection of data from key polluting sectors.  At least one meeting per annum is held between members and minutes recorded.	<b>MU</b>	Taking into account the Threat analyses and METT reports confirm the need for data access and sharing in some key areas that threaten the MPA networks from establishing effective co-management and ecological networks. These include: (i) water resources; (ii) agriculture (erosion, chemical inputs, slurry waste); (iii) fisheries (protection of sea mammals); (iv) transport (erosion, numbers of sea vessels, waste); (v) municipal law enforcement teams.
<b>Output 3.1b (separated from Output 3.1 in the Prodoc)</b> Investment strategies developed and implemented	No. of investment strategies produced and integrated into the Zhuhai and Dongying municipal 14 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plans	No investment plans supporting biodiversity conservation in the PRE and YRE available.	Investment strategy for the YRE prepared	Two investment strategies adopted and being applied in the 14 <sup>th</sup> municipal five-year plans for Zhuhai and Dongying Cities between 2021-2025.	<b>S</b>	Investment strategy prepared and adopted by Dongying municipal government in August 2022. Plan appears to be innovative with its main focus on developing eco-tourism services and sustainable agriculture, aquaculture and fisheries practices.

						<p>It appears the inclusion of payment for ecosystem services such as the creation of carbon trading schemes linked to wetland and mangrove restoration has not been explored.</p> <p>Investment plan for the PRE is planned for completion by December 2022.</p>
<b>Component 2</b>	<b>MPA Networking and Wetland Restoration</b>					
<b>Outcome 2</b>	Outcomes 2.1 to 2.3 in the Prodoc of 2013 have been updated in the ToC as follows: <b><i>Co-management of MPA networks in the YRE and PRE under a new integrated policy, planning, regulatory and institutional framework leads to the stabilisation and/or increase in their ecological goods and services over time (includes counts of fish eggs, fish larvae, migratory birds, carbon storage, flood prevention, etc.)</i></b>					
<b>Output 2.1</b> Biodiversity conservation gap analysis and ecological connectivity strategy completed	No. of gap analyses and connectivity strategies completed for PRE and YRE by 2021.	No gap analysis available.	<p>Gap analysis completed for all six MPAs in the YRE in Dec. 2021.</p> <p>Connectivity strategy identified for the MPA network in the YRE.</p> <p>Gap analysis in PRE has not been conducted</p>	One gap analysis report completed and used to support project implementation in YRE	<b>S</b>	<p>Gap analysis completed for YRE and is supporting Component 1 (cross-checked with Output 1.1, 1.4 and 1.5), still needed in the PRE. Connectivity strategy has been identified for YRE, which can be applied in the long-term integrated management and networking plan for the YRE National Park (cross-checked with Output 1.4).</p> <p>A connectivity strategy in the PRE MPA network needs to be identified as soon as possible to guide the formulation of the framework management and networking plan (cross-checked with Output 2.2).</p>

<p><b>Output 2.2</b> Management effectiveness of eleven MPAs strengthened through provision of support for updating of management plans, equipment for monitoring and surveillance, and staff training and introduction of principles of co-management and sustainable financial arrangements</p>	<p>No. of MPAs with management plans applying co-management, ecological and social networks by 2023; No. of MPAs actively applying GIS to develop co-management, ecological and social networks by 2022; No. of illegal actions registered in the MPA networks declines in the PRE and YRE between 2017 and 2025; METT scores increase in all 11 MPAs between 2017 and 2025.</p>	<p>11 MPAs have management plans that are outdated and operate in isolation of each other in the PRE and YRE (source METT).</p>	<p>Updating of existing management plans has started in 2022; GIS system has been established and online management and ecological monitoring database is in the process of development (cross-checked with Output 1.6) covering all 6 MPAs in the YRE. Online system established at <a href="http://www.estuary.com.cn">www.estuary.com.cn</a> No data reported yet on warnings and fines issued through improved GIS surveillance and patrols in the PRE/YRE (2017-2021). METT assessment in 2021 shows scores increased against baseline scores (2019) in all 11 MPAs.</p>	<p>All 11 MPAs have new management plans dedicated to developing co-management, ecological and social networks in PRE and YRE; 11 MPAs are applying GIS to develop their co-management, eco-monitoring and social networks; 11 MPAs are applying GIS to develop surveillance and support law enforcement in their respective MPA networks; METT scoring is applied bi-annually for all MPAs in the PRE and YRE.</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Training of updating of MPA management plans has started (cross-checked with Output 1.4), but not yet applying co-management, ecological and social networks. Online presentation of GIS system shows high resolution maps (1:5,000) will support effective management, eco-monitoring and surveillance activities in YRE and PRE. In the YRE the GIS system has been developed to cover the new National Park area. GIS system in the PRE and YRE NP is already supporting co-management, eco-monitoring and surveillance activities. MTR team collected data on patrols and surveillance to confirm GIS is supporting surveillance activities in the PRE and YRE, but to coordinate decision-making and law enforcement the coordination platform needs strengthening (cross-checked with Output 1.7) Latest METT scores appear to have overrated some criteria (such as on MPA management capacity), but are conducted bi-annually and still show positive trends to 2021.</p>
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<p><b>Output 2.3</b> Creation of at least one new provincial level MPA</p>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	No longer applicable in the YRE where a National Park is planned, or in the PRE where no new MPA is needed at this time. MTR team will recommend this output is removed.
<p><b>Output 2.4</b> Establishment of MPA coordinating networking mechanisms in two estuaries</p>	<p>No. of coordinating mechanisms created and operating by 2023 in PRE and YRE;</p> <p>No. of protocols agreed and operating on information sharing to support the development of the co-management, ecological and social networks in PRE/YRE.</p>	<p>No MOUs, or protocols available to share data and information between MPAs in the PRE or YRE.</p>	<p>Two MOUs have been agreed to share information between the MPAs in the YRE (2020) and PRE (2021);</p> <p>Protocols agreed on information and data sharing between the MPAs in the YRE and PRE in 2020 and 2021 respectively.</p>	<p>Two MOUs signed among MPA networking members;</p> <p>Protocols on monitoring, enforcement and information sharing agreed between the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE.</p>	S	<p>MOUs and protocols in place on information and data sharing between the MPAs in their respective networks in the PRE and YRE.</p>
<p><b>Output 1.7 (more relevant to component 2)</b> Increased operational effectiveness of two existing estuarine institutional coordination mechanisms in Shandong (ICM) and Guangdong (MALG)</p>	<p>No. of meetings held and documented with minutes that include (i) achievements including no. of conflicts causing negative impact in the PRE and YRE that have been resolved during the life of project to 2023, (ii) lessons and good practices identified; (iii), decisions agreed on next steps that are</p>	<p>No coordination mechanism in place for MPAs in the PRE/YRE.</p> <p>No conflicts have been resolved at the MPA network level.</p>	<p>Report on the Settlement of Conflicts Adversely Affecting the Pearl River Estuary has been completed.</p> <p>Two conflicts (garbage on the beach in Guangdong and abandoned oil wells in Shandong) have been addressed so far by: (i) beach cleaning activities involving more than 60 volunteers (ii) policy analysis of abandoned oil wells in the YRE (in progress)</p>	<p>Coordination mechanisms in the PRE/YRE show evidence in their minutes that informed decision-making is taking place to develop and consolidate (i) co-management networks; (ii) ecological networks and, (iii) social networks; (iv) law enforcement surveillance networks).</p>	MS	<p>Two conflicts have been addressed in the PRE and YRE. In the YRE the project has contributed to the removal of abandoned oil wells and the restoration of their sites back to wetlands (includes removal of invasive species) in line with the legal framework in place in China.</p> <p>The MTR team identified some gaps with the coordination mechanisms in place that have not been addressed so far: (i) in some MPAs lack of sufficient resources to promote engage in the mechanism to develop co-management,</p>

	to be reviewed in the next meeting(s).					ecological, social and law enforcement networks; (ii) the absence of a dedicated “secretariat” in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities to oversee the work of the MPA networks and identify key findings from the data sharing to support decision-making and guide initiatives such as environmental education and awareness raising (Component 4); (iii) the data sharing protocols to establish a multi-agency monitoring system (cross-checked with Output 3.4 – moved to end of component 1) have not been concluded with key sectors identified in the threat analysis and METT that cause conflicts in the PRE and YRE.
<b>Output 2.5</b> 2,000 ha of wetlands restored of which at least 1,000 ha of grass wetlands (Yellow River)	Verified annual land use reports (supported by GIS) showing no. of hectares of wetlands and grass wetland that have been restored in the YRE between 2017 and 2025.  Verified ecological monitoring reports show (i) increase in bird species such as	Lack of reliable data on exact number of hectares of wetlands that were restored in the PRE to 2016.	Three reports on land use change of different land types in the YRE conducted showing: (i) a decrease in unused land and cultivated land in the PRDNNR (67.08% of the total area in 2017 to 65.82% in 2021), (ii) an increase in water area (10.56% in 2017 to 11.69% in 2021) and, (iii) an increase in forest land, grassland and construction land (18,800 ha	2,000 ha of wetlands restored, of which at least 1,000 ha are grass wetlands in the PRDNNR in the PRE.	<b>HS</b>	The MTR identified a total of 7,791 ha of wetlands were restored at a total cost of CNY 651 m. between 2017 and 2021, of which 3,000 ha of grass wetlands were restored in the YRDNNR using local varieties of Suaeda salsa (seepweed).  A total of 6,463ha of wetland is in the process of restoration (includes removal the invasive species Spartina alterniflora and planting of Suaeda salsa and ecological restoration of seagrass beds).

	<p>the Oriental White Stork between 2017 and 2025; (ii) increase in fish egg and fish larvae densities by 2025; (iii) decrease in invasive species by 2023; (iv) increase in native wetland grasses by 2023.</p>		<p>of wetlands have been restored).</p>			<p>This amounts to 14,254 ha, which is slightly less than the 18,800 ha reported as restored by the PMO, but is still well over the restoration targets in the Prodoc.</p> <p>Ecological monitoring already is reporting an increase in (i) breeding pairs of Oriental white storks; (ii) numbers of black-headed gulls; (iii) fish egg densities may be increasing, but more monitoring is needed, (iii) reduction in invasive wetland grasses (through removal and sowing of native Suaeda salsa).</p>
<p><b>Output 2.6</b> 110 ha of mangroves restored (Pearl River) including the removal of abandoned mariculture facilities in QDINR and NFNNR (replaces the Hengqin Marine Park in the Prodoc, which is not part of the MPA network)</p>	<p>Verified annual land use reports (supported by GIS) showing no. of hectares of mangroves restored between 2017 and 2025.</p> <p>Verified ecological monitoring reports show (i) increase in bird species between 2017 and 2025; (ii) increase in fish egg and fish larvae densities by 2025; (iii) increase in</p>	<p>0 ha restored to 2017</p>	<p>PMO reports no restoration has taken place to date in the QDINR or the NFNNR.</p>	<p>110 ha of mangroves restored, including fish ponds in the QDINR and NFNNR.</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Gap analysis not completed to support identification of the mangrove restoration strategy, which is still being finalised (cross-checked with Output 1.5).</p> <p>However, triangulation of the Land Use and Landscape Change study, online presentations and the field visit to QDINR confirms mangrove restoration work has already restored a total of 120 ha of mangroves from 2017-2021 as follows: (i) 105.21 ha. in the QDINR, (ii) 14.8 ha of fishponds located in</p>

	sightings of Chinese white dolphin between 2017 and 2025; (iv) increase of all 11 native species of mangroves found in the PRE; (v) increase in number of pangolins and other highly endangered species.					the Futian Mangrove Nature Reserve (part of the NFNNR).  Ecological data confirms sightings of Chinese white dolphin have remained constant and restoration of 11 species of mangrove is advancing, but ecological monitoring data on other species is not yet available.
<b>Component 3</b>	<b>Threat Analysis, Mitigation and Monitoring and Enforcement</b>					
<b>Outcome 3</b>	Outcomes 3.1 to 3.4 in the Prodoc of 2013 have been updated in the ToC as follows: <b><i>YRE &amp; PRE register a net rise in public participation and economic investment dedicated to restoring, conserving and promoting the sustainable use of their ecological goods and services, aided by eco-monitoring data to support informed decision-making on where to target resources in the MPA networks.</i></b>					
<b>Output 3.1a</b> Comprehensive analysis of threats to the ecological “health” of the two ecosystems	No. of reports on ecological-based assessments of assessments (AOAs) produced.	No threat analyses or investment strategies available	Reports on ecological-based assessments completed and AOA for the YRE finalized and accepted by the PSC in 2022  Reports on ecological-based assessments completed, but AOA for the PRE planned has not been finalised.	2 x AOA completed and approved by the PSC for the PRE and YRE  2 x investment strategies identified, agreed and implemented through the 14 <sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plans of Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities	<b>MS</b>	AOA for the YRE has been completed and is being used to support the delivery of outcome 3 (cross-checked with outputs 1.4 and 1.5);  Presentation of the AOA for the PRE has not been finalised.
<b>Output 3.2</b> Sustainable production and service activities generating local income and	No. ha of agricultural land in the YRDNNR core zone converted to the eco-farming of mitten crab by 2025;	No sustainable practices or incomes evident in the PRE and YRE in 2017.	Shandong Huize Industrial Group has established an ecological demonstration farm of mitten crab covering 373 ha (5,600 mu) in the YRE (officially recognised by the	25 ha of agricultural land in the YRDNNR core zone converted to the eco-farming of mitten crab.	<b>S</b>	The eco-farming of mitten crab has already far exceeded the target of 25 ha. The field visit to the eco-farm confirms the eco-farm has signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the YRDNNR to sustainably

<p>reducing stress on critical estuarine habitats developed and implemented based on: (a) eco-farming of mitten crab in YRE; and (b) ecotourism, ecological compensation, PA employment in QDINR and NFNNR (replaces Hengqin Marine Park in the Prodoc that is no longer relevant).</p>	<p>No. of households with sustainable incomes in the MPA networks of the PRE and YRE by 2025;  No of fishermen and/or agriculturalists who achieve improved incomes from the application of sustainable fishing practices in the PRE and YRE by 2025.</p>		<p>Fisheries Bureau of MARA in 2022).  Report completed on supporting up to 15 fishing families in the PRE;</p>	<p>Sustainable incomes established for an estimated 3,000 households in the PRE and YRE  10–15 fishing families and/or agriculturalists in the QDINR and NFNNR have new jobs linked to ecotourism, eco-compensation or MPA employment.</p>		<p>produce around 500 metric tonnes of mitten crab/annum that will generate around CNY 50 million (USD 7.03 m.) in 2022.  No assessments have been conducted so far on supporting 3,000 households generate sustainable incomes;  Report on supporting up to 15 fisherfolk switch to ecotourism jobs (theme guides to promote ecotourism that educate, stimulates scientific research and spiritually uplifts eco-tourists who are searching for purpose in their lives) appears to be highly innovative.</p>
<p><b>Output 3.3</b> Village conservation groups operating and local communities participating in MPA activities</p>	<p>No. of local village conservation groups created and operating in the YRE by 2023;  No. of volunteers mobilised to participate in MPA activities by 2023  No. of local village conservation groups established in the PRE by 2023.</p>	<p>No official village conservation groups operating in the PRE to conserve biodiversity in MPAs</p>	<p>Five village conservation volunteer groups have been established in the YRE in 2022.  590 volunteers have participated in lad restoration activities (beach clean ups).  1 local village volunteer group established in the QDINR supporting beach</p>	<p>Five local village conservation groups operating in the YRE by 2023;  500 volunteers participating in MPA activities (includes the restoration of 5,000 ha of degraded land) in the YRE by 2023</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>All targets have been met in the Prodoc.  One caveat is that the there is no data collected on the area of beaches that have been cleaned/restored by the volunteer groups in PRE and YRE (cross-checked with Outcome 3.2 on reducing degraded land by 5,000 ha) in the PRE and YRE.</p>

			clean ups and mangrove restoration.	Formation of at least one local village conservation group in the PRE by 2023		
<b>Component 4</b>	<b>Capacity Building and Increasing Environmental Awareness</b>					
<b>Outcome 4</b>	Outcomes 4.1 to 4.2 in the Prodoc of 2013 have been updated in the ToC as follows: <i>The number of people/civil society organisations participating to protect, restore, conserve, monitor and sustainably use the ecological goods and services of YRE and PRE increases each year from 2021</i>					
<b>Output 4.1.</b> International and in-country training for senior officials and technical staff in ecosystem-based principles applied to the management and conservation of estuaries	No. of international and in-country training courses completed by 2025;  No. of senior managers, officials and technical staff from the PRE and YRE who participated in the courses (sex disaggregated)	No international and in-country training courses	No international or in-country training courses have taken place due to the limitations of the COVID-19 pandemic.  Two in-country training courses have taken place on biodiversity conservation and networking  45 senior managers, officials and technical staff have participated in the courses (16 women)	10 international and in-country training courses conducted;  Between 20 and 30 senior managers, officials and technical staff from the PRE and YRE have been trained in each training course completed.	<b>MS</b>	International travel is extremely difficult due to the strict COVID-19 rules and regulations in place in China. Progress in conducting in-country training on biodiversity conservation covering 45 senior officials from all 11 MPAs has progressed (20% of target). The quality of the is reported to be satisfactory, but needs to be stepped up in 2023.

<p><b>Output 4.2:</b> Training courses for community volunteers</p>	<p>No. of training workshops conducted on engaging public participation in MPA management including bird and dolphin watching, mangrove rangers etc.</p> <p>No. of participants who participate in the training (sex disaggregated).</p>	<p>No. of workshops conducted</p> <p>No. of people from local communities who participate in the workshops (sex disaggregated)</p>	<p>A training workshop for the volunteer groups to participate in the development of co-management, ecological and social and surveillance networks has not been identified so far.</p>	<p>2 training workshops (15-20 participants each), one per site, for increasing capacity in public participation in MPA management including bird and dolphin watching, mangrove rangers etc</p>	<p><b>MU</b></p>	<p>The volunteer groups and village conservation groups have been created in the YRE and PRE between 2021 and 2022, but the PMO lacks a specialist to oversee they are trained to support co-management, monitoring and law enforcement activities.</p>
<p><b>Outputs 4.3.</b> Cross-site visits</p>	<p>No. of cross-site visits conducted by 2023</p> <p>No. senior officials, government staff and technicians who participate in the cross-site visits</p>	<p>Zero cross-site visits</p>	<p>8 stakeholders from the PRE (Zhuhai municipal office and MPA managers) have visited the YRE; 4 stakeholders from the PRE (Dongying municipal office, FIO and MPAs) have visited the PRE and one (PMO team leader) visited the GEF-funded project on wetland restoration in Jilin Province.</p>	<p>44 person cross-site visits between the two sites</p>	<p><b>MS</b></p>	<p>Around 20% of the officials targeted have conducted cross-site visits. It appears more could be done to tailor the cross-site visits to, for example, address gaps in training, or assess good practices.</p>
<p><b>Output 4.4.</b> MPA managers and technical staff have attended international training session under south-</p>	<p>No. of international training session under south-south cooperation completed by 2023</p> <p>No. of MPA managers and technical staff</p>	<p>Zero international training sessions conducted</p>	<p>No international training has taken place due to the pandemic</p>	<p>20 MPA managers and technical staff have attended international training session under south-south cooperation.</p>	<p><b>MU</b></p>	<p>International training sessions are difficult to apply due to the COVID-19 pandemic rules and regulations in the PRC.</p> <p>Switching to online training has not been considered so far.</p>

<p>south coop. in: 1) co-management mechanisms; 2) cross-sector ecosystem approaches to estuarine biodiversity conservation; 3) systematic monitoring of ecosystem health.</p>	<p>who have attended the international training sessions by 2023 (sex disaggregated)</p>					
<p><b>Output 4.5.</b> Increased student awareness and knowledge of the significance of marine biodiversity conservation and the role of MPAs.</p>	<p>No. of reference books developed to support the science and geography curricula of schools in the PRE and YRE.  No. of students per year who know the project and develop relevant knowledge about each estuary</p>	<p>No schools in Zhuhai or Dongying had specific reference books on marine biodiversity conservation specifically relating to the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE</p>	<p>2 curricula developed for 3 schools (two in Dongying City and one on Qingdao City in Shandong Province.  Public science lectures and activities such as painting competitions on marine biodiversity have taken place.  Included in the 590 volunteers who have participated in the beach-cleaning activities in the Peral River Estuary have been school children and parents.</p>	<p>2 curricula developed for 2-3 school at each site.  100 students per year know the project and relevant knowledge at each estuary</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Qingdao Tong'an Road Primary School and Dongying Keda Primary School have created thematic museums for nature education.  Public activities are estimated to have already raised the awareness of 1,000 students, teachers and parents on the ecological goods and services MPAs in the YRE provide and on the need to conserve them.  In the PRE the MPAs have established less cooperation with local schools and eco-education is lower than in Domgyng.</p>
<p><b>Output 4.6.</b> Increased stakeholder awareness for marine</p>	<p>At least 500 volunteers and other stakeholders in each</p>	<p>Zero participation in biodiversity conservation events linked to</p>	<p>160 fisherfolk have participated in training courses dedicated to</p>	<p>At least 500 volunteers and other stakeholders in each site participate in the publicity activities.</p>	<p><b>S</b></p>	<p>Training of fisherfolk from the Guangli Port Fisherman's Association has been conducted in the YRE and included: (i) the provision of essential equipment</p>

biodiversity conservation and estuarine ecosystems	<p>site participate in the publicity activities.</p> <p>At least 20 decision makers participate in annual public forum about ecosystem-based management</p>	the MPA networks in the PRE and YRE	adoption of good fishing practices in the YRE.	At least 20 decision makers participate in annual public forum about ecosystem-based management		(life jackets, life buoys, etc.) (ii) mediating in disputes between local fishermen and fishermen from outside the MPA; (ii) breeding and release of fish larvae (including prawns, sea pike, crab, jellyfish and tonguefish)
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\*The MTR team found indicators in the Prodoc have been confused with targets. The indicators and targets have, therefore, been updated by the MTR team where relevant to match current political, policy and institutional developments since 2018 and in the PRE and YRE; \*\* Baseline information provided by MTR where unavailable in Prodoc.

**Indicator assessment key**

<b>Highly satisfactory</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Moderately satisfactory</b>	<b>Moderately unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory</b>	<b>Highly unsatisfactory</b>
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## Appendix 7. Co-financing table

Sources of co-financing	Name of co-financer	Type of co-finance <sup>34</sup>	Amount confirmed at CEO approval		Actual amount materialized (30 June 2022)		Actual amount materialized at the MTR on 30 Sept. 2022*	Expected total disbursement by end date on 03 Feb. 2023
			Cash	In kind	Cash	In kind		
National Gov.	NFGA	Cash	50,300		220,373		220,373	
National Gov.	NFGA	In-kind		648,304		9,446		9,446
Local Gov.	Guangdong Provincial Gov.	Cash	6,025,100		802,610		802,610	
Local Gov.	Guangdong Provincial Gov.	In-kind		747,035		7,729,079		7,729,079
Local Gov.	Shandong Provincial Gov.	Cash	3,526,000		47,120		47,120	
Local Gov.	Shandong Provincial Gov.	In-kind		789,527		28,085,268		28,085,268
Private Sector	DeepNature Tech. Co., Ltd	Cash	-		47,120		47,120	
FAO	FAO	Cash	139,300		0		0	
FAO	FAO	In-kind		92,914		96,625		96,625
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>9,740,700</b>	<b>2,277,780</b>	<b>1,117,223</b>	<b>35,920,418</b>	<b>1,117,223</b>	<b>35,920,418</b>

\* PMO confirmed no change in co-finance expenditure between 01/07/2022 and 30/09/2022.

<sup>34</sup> Grants, loans, equity participation by beneficiaries (individuals) in the form of cash, guarantees, in kind or material contributions and other (please explain).

## Appendix 8. GEF evaluation criteria rating table and rating scheme

GEF criteria/sub-criteria	Rating <sup>35</sup>	Summary comments <sup>36</sup>
<b>A. STRATEGIC RELEVANCE</b>		
A1. Overall strategic relevance	HS	Strategic relevance is high thanks to the Government reshuffle in 2018 which placed all PA management under the responsibility of the NFGA in the newly created MNR and President Xi's call to step up ecological protection and civilisation. The policy framework has also improved, with the introduction of the National Marine Economy Development Plan (2021-2025), which calls for the conservation and sustainable use of marine resources and the adoption of the Wetland Environmental Protection Law in June 2022.
A1.1. Alignment with GEF and FAO strategic priorities	HS	The Project remains fully aligned with BD-SP-2 and BD-SP-4 through its efforts to develop MPA networks and improving the policy, strategic and planning framework for MPAs to develop co-management, ecological and social networks in the PRE and YRE.
A1.2. Relevance to national, regional and global priorities and beneficiary needs	HS	The Project's relevance in the YRE has dramatically increased due to the national government's decision to create the YRE National Park to be officially launched in 2023 and which will absorb five of the six MPAs supported by Project 045. In addition, the Project is supporting the restoration and conservation of crucial habitats for almost 4% of the world's bird species and endangered species such as the Chinese White Dolphin and Oriental White Stork, among others. Qi'ao Mangrove Nature Reserve is committed to becoming a blue carbon model for China and globally.
A1.3. Complementarity with existing interventions	MS	The Prodoc listed potential synergies with other relevant projects, but these did not materialise due to a delay of ten years in starting implementation from the date when these synergies were identified in 2010. New opportunities for synergies with other GEF-funded projects has not materialised beyond

<sup>35</sup> See rating scheme at the end of the document.

<sup>36</sup> Include reference to the relevant sections in the report.

		<p><i>ad hoc</i> visits to the Poyang Lake to participate in the International Bird week supported by Project 052. Positive developments include: (i) signing up to the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 to identify opportunities for scientific cooperation; (ii) exploring networking with the GEF-funded project, "Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in South-East China to conserve globally significant coastal biodiversity" executed by the NFGA with the support of UNDP; (iii) PEC members coordinating coastal management activities with the GEF-funded project, "Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Phase II" also implemented by UNDP.</p>
<b>B. EFFECTIVENESS</b>		
B1. Overall assessment of project results	S	Accepting implementation started from the inception workshop in June 2020 (and not from the EOD in June 2017), the Project has made good progress in all four of its main components and in some cases has achieved/exceeded targets, especially on restoration and education outreach targets for both estuaries. This has been achieved in spite of the challenges of the government's zero tolerance policy on COVID-19 outbreaks.
B1.1 Delivery of project outputs	S	Delivery has been satisfactory with around 48% of planned outputs delivered, or in the process of delivery to 30/09/2022. Progress is most evident in the YRE, where the Project's actions support the creation of the YRE National Park.
B1.2 Progress towards outcomes <sup>37</sup> and project objectives	MS	There is evidence the Project is starting to deliver a reversal in the loss of critical habitats that are crucial to restoring, conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity in the PRE and YRE developing the policy, strategic and planning framework to establish MPA networks, which in the case of the YRE will largely be absorbed into the YRE National Park, and on restoration of habitats and education outreach. However, multi-sector coordination mechanisms still need to be strengthened, especially in the PRE and absence of long-term capacity development and law enforcement plans

<sup>37</sup> Assessment and ratings by individual outcomes may be undertaken if there is added value.

		to support MPA networking and management are were not identified by the MTR team
- Outcome 1 (Component 1)	S	The Project is making good progress in establishing a more integrated policy, planning and regulatory framework needed to support and guide the development and management of the MPA networks. Work on how the MPA management teams will implement the framework documents in their management plans still needs clarifying in the PRE, while in the YRE the YRE National Park will have its own management plan that will cover a wider area than the MPA network (approximately 351,799 ha). The main gap is the need for long-term capacity development and law enforcement framework plans, which are gaps in Component 1 of Prodoc.
- Outcome 2 (Component 2)	HS	The Project has made very good progress in starting the process of halting and reversing the degradation of the habitats and biodiversity in the MPA networks. Intra coordination mechanisms are in place to share data between MPAs, METT scores are improving in all MPAs and restoration work in critical coastal and seascapes in the PRE (mangroves) and YRE (wetlands) using native species of mangroves and wetland grasses have already exceeded the targets.
- Outcome 3 (Component 3)	S	Good progress has been made in identifying threats to the ecological health of the MPA networks and there is evidence public investment has increased substantially in support of ecological protection and civilisation, especially in the YRE, where public investment is supporting the work associated with the creation of the YRE National Park in 2023. However, multi-sector coordination mechanisms are not evident so far to support common approaches to key issues such as ecological monitoring, or law enforcement. Also, development of monitoring of socio-economic threats to accompany eco-monitoring was not evident.
- Outcome 4 (Component 4)	S	Triangulated evidence confirms good progress has been made in raising the awareness of local communities on the importance of estuarine ecological goods and services to their livelihoods and local economy. Six volunteer groups have been established and community actions such as beach

		clean-ups and public safety have taken place, which are already surpassing targets. Education outreach with school children, teachers and parents has already exceeded targets with close to 1,800 individuals estimated to have benefitted directly from Project activities. However, no international training courses and exchanges have taken place, and only two of the ten in-country workshops have been realised, in part due to restrictions on travel due the continuation of the zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19
- Overall rating of progress towards achieving objectives/ outcomes	S	The Project will not be able to achieve its objective by the current closure date (03/02/2023), but if extended to complete 60 months of execution (to mid-2025), there is significant evidence to indicate it can achieve its objective.
B1.3 Likelihood of impact	UA	Not rated in MTRs
<b>C. EFFICIENCY</b>		
C1. Efficiency <sup>38</sup>	HS	Since the inception workshop, the Project is demonstrating it can transform its resources into results in a timely and efficient manner. Overall physical progress (48%) has been achieved in just 27.5 months of operations since the inception workshop in June 2020 and using only 22.5 per cent of the GEF budget (USD 791,489), although actual expenditure including pending payments amounts to around 30% of GEF funds. Also impressive is that for every US Dollar of GEF expenditure, the Project has leveraged USD 35 in cash and in-kind payments (USD 37,037,641), which is highly satisfactory. A significant proportion of this co-finance (USD 29 m.) has been spent in the YRE in support of the development t of the YRE National Park.
<b>D. SUSTAINABILITY OF PROJECT OUTCOMES</b>		
D1. Overall likelihood of risks affecting sustainability	ML	The MTR team found the PMO and FAO have paid insufficient attention to developing effective risk management and that this has contributed to underestimating some major risks, some of which have been identified in the METT assessment and the threat analysis conducted in 2020-2021. In addition, triangulated evidence confirms two risks

<sup>38</sup> Includes cost efficiency and timeliness.

		could have a bearing on the sustainability of the MPA networks: (i) a lack of cross-sector mechanisms to manage overlapping mandates and laws of different institutions within the jurisdictions of the MPA networks; (ii) insufficient attention to integrating adaptive management capacity into restoration and conservation of MPA networks to build resilient estuarine ecosystems and communities.
D1.1. Financial risks	ML	Although financial risks are low, witnessed by substantial co-finance and the fact the new YRE National Park is projected to have a five-year budget in the order of CNY 61 billion (USD 8.5 billion), long-term funding of the PRE MPA network is not clear, especially as there is no long-term capacity development plan to provide clarity on the funding needed to support the development to co-management, ecological, social networks in the PRE. Funding of law enforcement networks is also unclear due to the absence of a long-term law multi-sector law enforcement plan.
D1.2. Socio-political risks	ML	Socio-political risks have, on the one hand, been mitigated by the government reshuffle, which has clarified the political mandate of the /Natural Protected Areas Department within the MNR/NFGA to concentrate on management, while the political mandate of MEE has been clarified to only concentrate on monitoring and assessments of PA management. Similarly, the stepping-up of ecological civilisation has increased investment in environmental education. On the other hand, the reshuffle did not cover the cross-sector cooperation mechanisms to be developed at all levels, but especially at the provincial and municipal levels, which have received more devolved powers and are expected to deliver ecological civilisation.
D1.3. Institutional and governance risks	ML	Institutional risks are considered moderate. The gap analysis for the PRE has not been completed to guide the Project's approach to key issues such as the need for more cross-sector planning at the provincial and municipal levels in areas such as monitoring and law enforcement. Moreover, although the dissolution of SOA resulted in the transfer of ecological monitoring to MEE, the country's three marine monitoring centres (such as

		the South China Sea Monitoring Centre which is responsible for the PRE.) remain autonomous.
D1.4. Environmental risks	ML	The Project has a strong focus on restoring and conserving the ecological functions of the estuarine ecosystems of PRE an YRE, but has underestimated the risks associated with the effects of climate variability and change. Indeed, the UN Secretary General has recently stated at the COP27 that “Our planet is fast approaching tipping points that will make climate chaos irreversible”.
D2. Catalysis and replication	ML	The Project has demonstrated that its education outreach activities, promotion of eco-tourism services and support to some eco-friendly production methods by the private sector (for example, mitten crab and closed production of selected sea fish species that treat waste water) can reduce environmental impact on coastal wetland habitats. Lessons from these and other initiatives have been incorporated into the investment strategies prepared by Project 045 to promote sustainable business development in Zhuhai and Dongying municipalities. However, catalysing private investment has not been adequately addressed so far in these strategies. Catalysing/replicating research and marine restoration activities is not yet evident, but opportunities are likely to arise through the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development 2021-2030 and through the MoU to be signed with the GEF6-funded project supporting MPA management along the Southeast coast of China.
<b>E. FACTORS AFFECTING PERFORMANCE</b>		
E1. Project design and readiness <sup>39</sup>	MS	The Project’s design is outdated considering it dates back to 2010 and is in need of updating, although a large number of the planned outputs have stood the test of time well and remain highly relevant. The most important updating concerns the RM, which was found to have shortcomings in both the vertical and horizontal causal logic. In particular outcomes (results) are not supported by a Theory of Change, are too numerous to support effective results monitoring and not very coherent with outputs.

<sup>39</sup> This refers to factors affecting the project’s ability to start as expected, such as the presence of sufficient capacity among executing partners at project launch.

		Also, indicators have no baselines and often are confused with targets.
E2. Quality of project implementation	S	The MTR team found the overall quality of training and outputs under all components was found to meet local/national standards, enhance ecological civilisation (at all levels) and satisfy the needs and aspirations of participants.
E2.1 Quality of project implementation by FAO (BH, LTO, PTF, etc.)	MS	The quality of FAO's oversight has been affected by external factors, in particular the government reshuffle in 2018 and the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prevented travel of FAO-R and FAO-RAP staff to China. The government reshuffle coupled with the introduction of the OPIM modality in 2017 has resulted in a lot of time and transactions being dedicated to amending and applying the EA in line with the risk ratings applied by two fiduciary assessments. In addition, FAO-CN is no longer required to provide any technical support duties since the conclusion of the EA in 2017. However, there is no CTA, which means FAO-CN and the PMO rely heavily on the LTO. However, the LTO has been unable to visit China due to the Zero-tolerance policy on COVID-19. This situation has been further compounded by the fact FAO-CN provides no technical oversight to the Project and, instead, relies on the LTO, based in FAO-RAP.
E2.2 Project oversight (PSC, project working group, etc.)	S	The PSC took time to mobilise due to the delays caused by the government reshuffle, but since 2020 the PSC has met regularly and provided timely support and guidance. This is aided by the fact there are Guangdong and Shandong Provincial representatives of MNR in the PSC. Oversight by the PEC was found to be satisfactory in terms of providing adequate levels of quality assurance, but only moderately satisfactory in supporting the PMO address the abovementioned gaps and the development of synergies with other projects.
E3. Quality of project execution	S	The quality of the Project's execution by NFGA/Department of Natural PAs was found to be satisfactory, with no evidence to suggest it has affected the Project's performance. However, because the PSC has no cross-sector representation (in particular from MEE, or the Bureau of Fisheries which continues to be responsible for the conservation of marine animals such as dolphins),

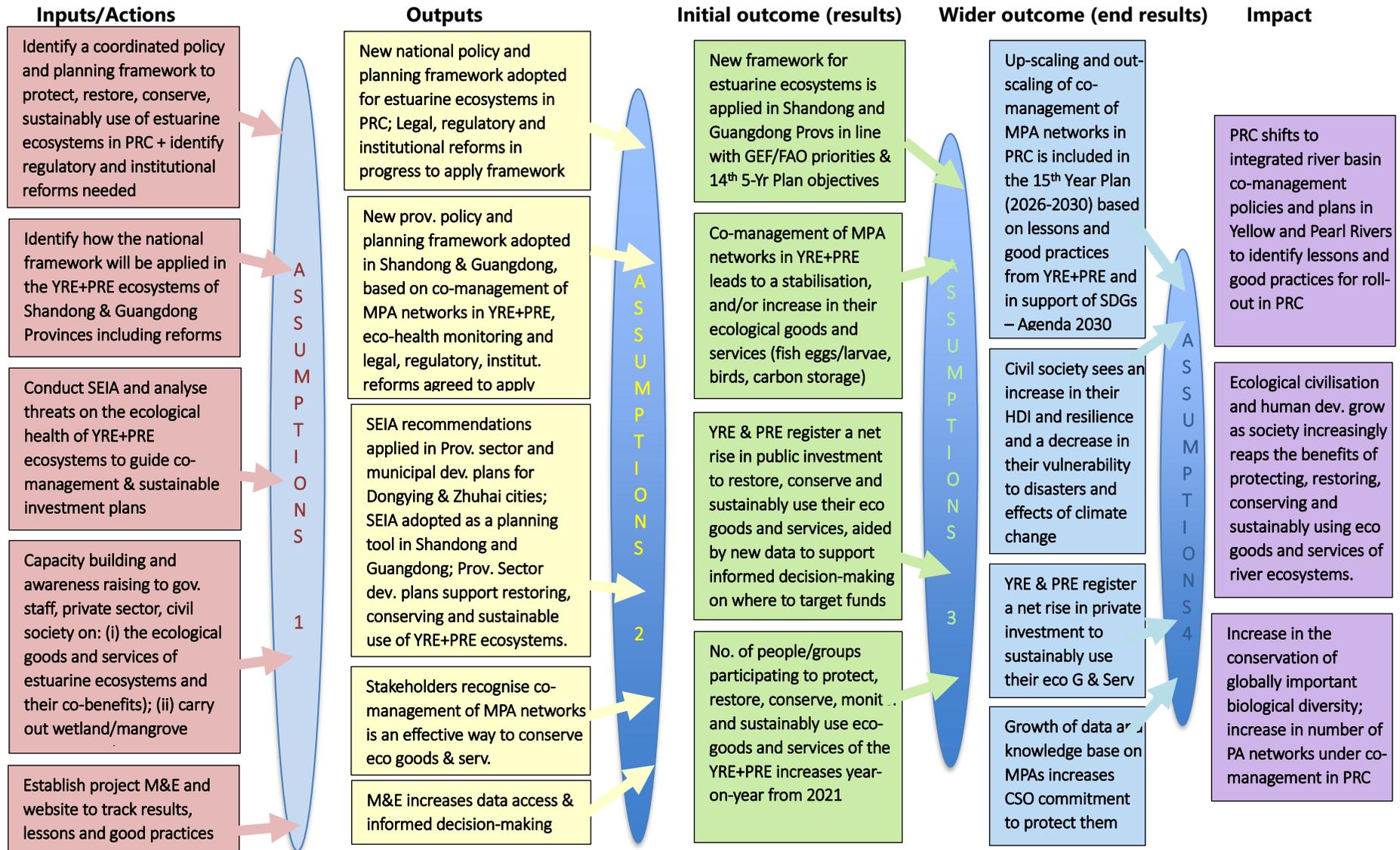
		communication and lobbying of support from different sectors is dependent on the PSC members adopting proactive positions. The MTR team found they have limited time to assume such tasks.
E3.1 Project execution and management (PMO and executing partner performance, administration, staffing, etc.)	S	The PMO has a highly qualified team leader who has in-depth work experience in managing and administrating projects and who is also well connected, especially with stakeholders in Dongying municipality, thanks to FIO's offices being located in nearby Qingdao City in Shandong Province. However, the PMO team of five (including an intern) is regularly overloaded with work, because it lacks key personnel, especially a CTA and M&E specialist. Capacity in developing and applying an effective gender and risk management strategy is also low.
E4. Financial management and co-financing	S	Financial management of GEF funds was found to be satisfactory, although the MTR team found the PMO cannot under the rules of MNR/FIO cannot advance funds to the MPA management teams and other participating institutions under current rules and regulations. As a result, all activities have to be reimbursed with GEF funds, which incurs delays.
E5. Project partnerships and stakeholder engagement	MS	The Project has secured an internal information sharing MoU between all the MPA management teams in the PRE and YRE, but this is not being applied effectively so far, because the coordination mechanisms have yet been consolidated (with a secretariat with the powers to execute and follow-up on decisions taken). At the GEF portfolio level FAO-CN has not supported the establishment of formal synergies with other GEF-funded projects in China that have areas of mutual interest (such as the River and Lake Health Assessments applied by Project 057, or wetland restoration strategies applied by Projects 052 and 048). However, a MoU is in the process of development between Project 045 and the project supporting MPA management along the Southeast coast of China and, potentially, with the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Phase II project implemented by UNDP.
E6. Communication, knowledge management and knowledge products	S	The PMO has produced a large number of knowledge products such as reference and text books for school children and the GIS system under development will provide password access to a large amount of data and maps on the PRE and YRE

		for stakeholders, universities and research institutions. The Project also has a WeChat service to allow youths access to environmental information. However, the PMO needs more support and training on knowledge management to develop a more effective communication strategy with other relevant GEF-funded projects in order to target different audiences in a more coordinated manner in order to bring about change.
E7. Overall quality of M&E	MS	The quality of the M&E is moderately satisfactory, because it is obliged to track outcomes, outputs and indicators in the Prodoc that are in urgent need of updating, clarifying and simplifying.
E7.1 M&E design	MS	M&E design includes a checks-and-balances approach, whereby information has to first undergo review from the PEC and then the PMO, before it can enter the system. A major weakness in the design is that it only focuses on quantitative indicators that, as mentioned above, refer more to targets. There are no qualitative targets to encourage stakeholders and end beneficiaries to participate in surveys and spot checks to determine potential for transformational change (such as through KAP surveys).
E7.2 M&E plan implementation (including financial and human resources)	MS	The M&E plan is implemented as a team effort involving all of the PMO's staff. However, it was not designed by an M&E specialist through which data is processed and validated to support decision-making in at the provincial, municipal and MPA levels.
E8. Overall assessment of factors affecting performance	S	Overall, three factors need to be addressed if the Project is to fully achieve its objective. First, the Project design needs to be reviewed by stakeholders and gaps/shortcomings addressed. Second, FAO-CN is no longer required to provide any technical oversight, which instead should be covered by a CTA (who has not been recruited to date) and the LTO, (who has been unable to visit the Project due to the COVID-19 pandemic). This has contributed to delays in the implementation of some activities under Component 4 concerning international training and exchanges. Moreover, because FAO-CN has limited funds its ability to carry out regular site visits has been severely restricted to mission per year. Third, formal

		synergies with other GEF-funded projects managed by FAO have not materialised so far and are only in their early stages with relevant GEF6-funded project managed by UNDP. As such opportunities to carry out joint planning, data assessments and review of results and lessons learned/good practices have not materialised so far.
<b>F. CROSS-CUTTING CONCERNS</b>		
F1. Gender and other equity dimensions	MU	The Prodoc has completely overlooked the importance on integrating gender equality into the Project's design, in order groups such as women have equal access to training, information and resources. As a result, the PSC, PEC and all but two MPA managers are women. The PMO has, however, conducted monitoring of women's participation at the local level, where data indicates the average participation rate of women in training activities is around 27 per cent, which is below the recommended rate in GEF and FAO Guidelines.
F2. Human rights issues	MS	This issue is a very sensitive topic in China and was not analysed. However, the MTR team did not identify any substantial evidence to indicate any end beneficiary had been forced to participate against their will in the Project's activities, or that their basic rights had been violated.
F2. Environmental and social safeguards	MS	The Project was designed before the ESS became mandatory. A cross-check by the MTR team indicates the Project design falls short on ESS-1 (building resilience to climate change) and ESS-8 (gender equality).
<b>Overall project rating</b>		<b>S</b>

*Ratings: Highly satisfactory (HS), Satisfactory (S), Moderately satisfactory (MS), Moderately unsatisfactory (MU), Unsatisfactory (U) Highly unsatisfactory (HU) Unable to assess (UA). Additional ratings for Section E: Likely (L), Moderately likely (ML), Moderately unlikely (MU), Unlikely (U).*

## Appendix 9. Participatory Theory of Change



**Assumptions 1: inputs are adequate and provided on time; stakeholders support co-management of MPAs with inclusive approaches; principles of sustainable use are agreed.**  
**Assumptions 2: reform process is not set back by new government reshuffles or changes; national/sub-national gov. stakeholders assign adequate resources; risks mitigated.**  
**Assumptions 3: stakeholders are committed to continuing and consolidating the project’s main actions; risk management, social equality and law enforcement are applied.**  
**Assumptions 4: Government stakeholders agree that wider approaches to co-management of river ecosystems are needed to protect MPAs over the long-term.**

