MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON THE CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF MARINE TURTLES AND THEIR HABITATS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN AND SOUTH-EAST ASIA

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23 October 2026

11TH MEETING OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Bonn, Germany, 8-11 December 2026
Agenda Item 5.5

DRAFT CONCEPT FOR THE IOSEA SITE NETWORK DISCUSSION GROUP

(*Prepared by the Secretariat*)

Mandate:

- WP #41: *Revive the Site Network Discussion Group to provide advice to Site Managers, identify funding sources, and discuss how the designation can add value to the accepted Sites, and maximize the benefit to the IOSEA network.*

Summary:

- Overview of status of membership
- Draft concept for operationalizing the Site Network Discussion Group, foreseeing a webinar series to facilitate knowledge exchange

Action requested:

- Provide feedback and guidance

DRAFT CONCEPT FOR THE IOSEA SITE NETWORK DISCUSSION GROUP

1. The 9th Meeting of Signatories requested the Secretariat to update the membership of the Site Network Discussion Group, comprised of Site Managers or their representatives, and to initiate discussions.

2. The Secretariat has made significant efforts to receive nominations for the Group from all Sites, resulting in 11 of 15 Sites currently represented, as shown in this table. However, some of the nominated members have become unresponsive in the meantime. Renewed efforts to secure an active membership covering all Sites will be made as soon as the proposal for next steps is ready for discussion with the members.

Subregion	Site	Update 2024	Nomination received
WIO	Rufiji-Mafia Seascape	Yes	No
WIO	Aldabra Atoll	Yes	Yes
WIO	Mohéli Island	No	No
WIO	Europa Island	Yes	Yes
WIO	iSimangaliso Wetland Park	Yes	No
NWIO	Sheedvar Island	Yes	No
NWIO	Sir Bu Na'air Reserve	Yes	Yes
NWIO	Bu Tinah Shoal	Yes	Yes
NWIO	Al Qurm Protected Area (Khor Kalba)	n/a	Yes
NWIO	Sharma, Jathmoun & Dhargum	n/a	Yes
NWIO	Khore Omiera	n/a	Yes
NIO	Cox's Bazar Coast	n/a	Yes
SEA+	Thameehla Island	No	Yes
SEA+	Côn Đảo National Park	Yes	Yes
SEA+	Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary	No	Yes

3. While established already shortly after the IOSEA Site Network's launch, the Site Network Discussion Group has never been an active forum for exchange amongst the site managers. Feedback received indicates that an active Group would add significant value to the recognition of a site as part of the IOSEA Site Network, and therefore the Secretariat has developed the concept presented in this document as a proposal for a way to operationalize the Group.

Objective

4. The aim of the proposal is to establish the Site Network Discussion Group as a collaborative platform under the MOU to strengthen communication, knowledge exchange, and capacity-building among participating sites. The initiative would support implementation of the MOU by facilitating regular dialogue among site managers, conservation practitioners, and national focal points.

5. Participation in the Discussion Group would enhance the practical value of Site Network membership by creating opportunities for regular engagement, visibility, learning, and collaboration among designated sites.

Rationale

6. The IOSEA Site Network encompasses a diverse range of nationally managed sites that contribute to the conservation of marine turtles and their habitats. While these sites face many common challenges, opportunities for direct exchange among managers and practitioners remain limited.

7. The re-establishment of the Site Network Discussion Group provides an opportunity to:

- Strengthen connections among Site Network participants across the IOSEA region.
- Promote peer-to-peer learning and dissemination of best practices.
- Facilitate the exchange of practical solutions to shared management challenges.
- Share information on funding sources and how they accessed them
- Identify emerging thematic priorities requiring regional cooperation.
- Foster a community of practice that can contribute to the effectiveness of site-based conservation measures.

Proposed Approach

8. The Discussion Group would initially convene through a structured series of virtual meetings in a webinar format. Each session would feature presentations by representatives from one or more Site Network locations, focusing on:

- Site characteristics and conservation significance
- Management experiences and operational challenges
- Approaches adopted to address those challenges
- Notable achievements, lessons learned, and good practices
- Emerging priorities and future management needs.

9. The Secretariat would facilitate an initial pilot session and provide a common presentation framework to support consistency and comparability across sites, with the following arrangements proposed:

- Virtual meetings held approximately every two to three months
- Sessions of 60-90 minutes duration
- Interactive format encouraging discussion, questions, and knowledge exchange
- Participation open to Site Network representatives, National Focal Points, AC and MTTF Members, relevant experts, and partner organizations, as appropriate.
- A channel of communication for exchange between sessions (e.g. a mailing list or shared SharePoint space)

10. To ensure that the sessions respond to participants' needs, a short survey on preferred topics, formats and meeting frequency could be circulated beforehand. The initial pilot session could introduce the concept of the webinars and could include an introductory round in which each Site presents itself briefly.

11. Following some sessions focusing on individual sites, the webinar series could also include thematic sessions on issues of common interest, noting the strong relevance also to considerations under AC11 Agenda Item 5.6 *Development of a Capacity-Building Framework*.

Expected Outputs and Benefits

12. The Discussion Group is expected to generate:

- Improved understanding of common conservation and management challenges across the IOSEA region.
- Enhanced exchange of technical knowledge and practical experience.
- Identification of priority themes that may warrant further scientific or management attention.
- Stronger engagement among Site Network participants.
- Improved understanding of how the designation can add value to the Sites, and of potential funding opportunities.
- Development of collaborative relationships that support regional conservation objectives.
- A foundation for a more self-sustaining network of practitioners contributing to implementation of the MOU.

13. Key lessons and good practices emerging from discussion sessions could be compiled and made available through the IOSEA website and newsletter.

14. The effectiveness of the initiative could be reviewed after an initial trial period, taking into account participation rates, regional representation, topics discussed, and feedback from Discussion Group members regarding its usefulness and relevance. The Secretariat proposes an initial two-year pilot phase of virtual discussion sessions, after which the format and frequency could be reviewed, including options for the Group to become progressively self-led.

Potential Challenges and Related Considerations

15. Given the broad geographic coverage of the IOSEA region, achieving equitable participation across time zones may present challenges. To promote inclusivity, meeting times could be rotated among subregions, complemented by recordings and written summaries to ensure continued access to discussions and outputs.

16. Language diversity within the IOSEA region may limit the ability of some practitioners to participate fully in technical discussions. This challenge may be mitigated through the use of accessible presentation formats, advance circulation of materials, written engagement options, and, where feasible, technological tools that support captioning and translation.

17. Differences in connectivity and technical capacity across participating sites may affect engagement in virtual meetings. The use of low-bandwidth participation options, combined with the distribution of meeting materials and recordings, can help ensure broad accessibility.

18. While challenges related to language, time zones, and technical capacity are anticipated, these are common considerations in regional and global conservation networks. By adopting flexible and inclusive participation mechanisms, the Site Network Discussion Group can help strengthen communication across the IOSEA region and contribute to a more connected and collaborative community of practice.

Next Steps

19. Following feedback from the Advisory Committee, the Secretariat will refine the concept as needed and share it with the members of the Site Network Discussion Group for comments. Once agreement has been reached on the concept, the Secretariat will identify a volunteer for making the first presentation and schedule the first webinar.

20. In parallel, the Secretariat will renew efforts to identify a Discussion Group member for each Network Site, working with National Focal Points to identify and confirm Site Manager contacts where necessary

21. The AC is invited to provide feedback on the proposal and give any guidance as required, including for example:

    - Suggesting priority technical themes for future sessions
    - Advice on mechanisms for capturing and disseminating lessons learned
    - Considering how information emerging from the Discussion Group could feed into future AC work.