

Concept Paper on the Proposed ASEAN Maritime Organization (AMO+) Plus

Rationale:

1. South China Sea (SCS) is the bridge between the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean.
2. 60% of the World's trade passes through the SCS.
3. The littoral countries surrounding the SCS are the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and China.
4. The important navigational passages and waypoints in SCS are the Malacca Strait, Indonesia's Lombok Strait, Vietnam's East Sea Passage, Philippines' Palawan Passage and Luzon Strait, among others.
5. Aside from its importance as a navigational sea passage, the SCS is part of the Coral Triangle. The Coral Triangle is the epicenter of marine diversity and a global priority for conservation, stretching from the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Timor Leste, Papua New Guinea, and to the Solomon Islands.
6. The Coral Triangle is delineated into different ecoregions (based on species diversity, habitat type and diversity, oceanography, geomorphology, bathymetry, sea level fluctuations, and river discharge), At the center of the ecoregions is the SCS.
7. The SCS serves as the:
 - a. The spawning ground of fishes and other marine organisms,
 - b. The location of the highest concentration of coral reefs in the world, and
 - c. The center of Larval (population) connectivity of the Coral Triangle.
8. Overall, in terms of geostrategic and economic value the marine ecosystem of the SCS cannot be overstated. It is the seat of scarce resources critical to ecological balance not only of its littorals but also the rest of the world.
9. On these bases, the marine environment of the SCS must be protected and preserved through a collaborative effort led by the ASEAN.

Structure:

The AMO will be patterned after the International Maritime Organization (IMO). It will consist of an Assembly, a Council and five main committees: the Maritime Safety Committee, the Marine Environment Protection Committee, the Legal Committee, the Technical Cooperation Committee and the Facilitation Committee.

Advantages:

1. ASEAN Centrality, however its organization is open to other countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia, South Korea and China among others.
2. Freedom of Navigation through Joint Patrols and Inspections.
3. Protection and Preservation of the Marine Environment through Marine Scientific Researches (MSR).
4. Increased cooperation and collaboration among member states.
5. Enhanced ASEAN Integration.
6. Information Exchanges
7. A body for peaceful resolution of disputes.

For comments and questions, please send them to:

RADM Vicente M. Agdamag (Ret)

Email Address: vicente.agdamag@gmail.com