

# The focus and path of promoting the blue partnership between China and ASEAN

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With the increasing impact of climate change and marine pollution, marine ecological and environmental problems have become increasingly prominent. At the same time, the development of marine science and technology has led to over-exploitation of marine resources, and non-sustainable marine economic model is also rapidly consuming various marine resources. This has become one of the real challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations.

In the context of globalization, no country can stand alone. Once the coastal countries that depend on the sea for their livelihood are troubled by marine problems, the entire international community will be affected. Whether it is the government, enterprises, or individuals, they have all become important stakeholders. That is to say, the solution to ocean problems urgently needs full cooperation of the international community, which forms the basis for the concept of blue economy.

According to the definition of the UN, a sustainable blue economy is "an economy that promotes economic growth, maintains and improves people's living standards, and ensures the sustainable use of marine resources". In 2012, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) put forward the concept of "blue economy" for the first time, and it was quickly and widely accepted and advocated. In 2015, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development clarified the sustainable development goals in the field of ocean governance. The concept of "blue economy" has further expanded the scope of "green economy", and marine environmental issues have therefore received more attention.

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There are four main internal driving forces for China-ASEAN blue economy cooperation: the need to jointly promote economic recovery under the covid-19 epidemic, the need to continuously deepen cooperation in the marine industry, the need to maintain regional peace and stability, and the need to determine the path of cooperation in the form of law or policy. However, it should also be noted that marine cooperation will not take place only because of these inherent needs. In the past few decades, the blue economy cooperation between China and ASEAN has also been hindered by the constraints from multiple stakeholders and geopolitical factors. Policy coordination and institutional arrangements between the two sides are key issues.

Under the current situation, to promote the China-ASEAN blue economy partnership, it is necessary to adhere to multilateralism and open regionalism to establish an open and inclusive regional cooperation structure. China should enhance the integration of interests with neighboring countries through more diverse and specific cooperation projects and maintain a sufficient and stable supply of marine public goods. Through the positive will, common concepts and successful practices of regional ocean governance cooperation, China and ASEAN can reduce the negative impact of geopolitical factors on ocean governance.

The South China Sea is the common homeland of China and ASEAN countries. Although the relevant disputes are difficult to resolve in the short term, the cooperation between China and ASEAN under

the framework of the blue partnership has great potential. The two sides can achieve mutual benefit and win-win results by steadily advancing marine aquaculture, marine fishery processing, marine transportation, marine new energy, marine biomedicine, and environmental protection. It is worth noting that under the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, blue carbon has become one of the focuses of the international community. As the main natural carbon sink in marine ecosystems, blue carbon sink has significant advantages over green carbon sink in carbon capture and storage and is an important way to achieve carbon peaking and carbon neutrality. China and ASEAN can actively explore ways to promote blue carbon research and blue carbon conservation cooperation. In the future, China-ASEAN blue partnership could focus on three aspects.

First, the two sides could conduct consultations and take substantial steps towards the formal establishment of the bilateral blue partnership. Second, the two sides could deepen cooperation in marine industry, interconnection, early warning and disaster reduction, ecological protection, scientific and technological innovation, therefore, to enhance regional energy security and sustainable development. Third, It is important to give full play to the respective advantages of government, industry, and academia, and actively carry out policy communication and information sharing.

In terms of marine environmental protection, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperative relationship between the government and the private sector. Also, the government, enterprises and social groups could provide more diversified funding sources in marine pollution prevention and control. At the same time, China and ASEAN countries can provide financial support for the upgrade and transformation of the marine industry and marine infrastructure out of funds under Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund (CAF).

In terms of marine biodiversity conservation, China and ASEAN can explore the establishment of a common fishery resource management and conservation mechanism and support non-regional countries and international organizations to play a constructive role in maintaining marine biodiversity in the South China Sea. Under this framework, China and ASEAN countries should strengthen information sharing and policy coordination and find a balance between the development of the fishery industry and the protection of marine biodiversity. In the ongoing BBNJ negotiations, China

and ASEAN countries should also strengthen communication and cooperation.

In the field of education and scientific research, China and ASEAN countries can set up more educational programs to raise the public's awareness of ocean governance and sustainable development. At the same time, through project cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, the practice cases of different countries in the region will be shared, and the vision and ideas of China-ASEAN development of sustainable blue economy will be developed. Education departments of both sides can also set up China-ASEAN Blue Partnership Scholarships to cultivate professionals in the field of sustainable marine development.

Last but not the least, on the maritime cooperation platform, China and ASEAN countries can discuss the establishment of a "cooperation mechanism for the coastal states of the South China Sea". The ideal solution for this mechanism would be to establish a "South China Sea Coastal State Cooperation Committee" through the conclusion of a legally binding agreement. However, in the short to medium term, the littoral countries of the South China Sea can establish a relatively flexible "cooperation forum between littoral countries" and concentrate resources to achieve cooperation results in the aforementioned areas, and then gradually promote the upgrading of this mechanism.

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