

## It's Official!

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After 12 months of hard work, we have officially opened Shallow Waters community based marine resource management programme on Koh Sdach! The opening meeting on the 26th of September saw around 50 officials, local fishermen, businessmen and community leaders come together to gauge support and discuss the practical implementation of a Community Fishery Organisation (CFO) for the Koh Sdach archipelago. Attendees included the Director of the Koh Kong Fishery Administration, Mr. Lang Kiry, the Deputy District Governor, Mr. Nim Phearum, and representatives from the local government, Police and Navy, as well as members of Kampot's Fishery Community Organisation, a successful natural resource management and eco-tourism site. The meeting also nicely coincided with the arrival of our latest volunteers who were on hand to help out, have a chat with attendees and experience the official opening first hand.



Our partner organization Wildlife Conservation Cambodia coordinated the meeting, and after introductions from the panel, including the only speech in English by Shallow Waters Project Manager Luca Budello, translated by Thy Long, members of Kampot community fishery organization shared their experience of CFO creation. The benefits that Kampot's CFO reported include an increase in both job availability and salaries from the management and use of alternative resources and ecotourism. This was a great way to start the meeting off and bolster support from local people.



After a quick coffee break, the group discussions began and focused on two questions: where the boundaries for the community fishery organization should be and why, and what kinds of people are needed to found the CFO. It was decided that the surrounding 11 islands of the archipelago were all important for different reasons, some groups mentioning important species and habitats such as turtles, seahorses, coral reefs, seagrasses and mangrove forests. The consensus was that we need a lot more knowledge about the area from experienced fishermen and scientific knowledge from surveys in order to map the area properly. It was also decided that both men and women must be involved in the creation of the CFO, someone with strong leadership qualities, local business people and others with skills such as accounting and IT. At the end of the meeting, there were 11 locals who voted to be the founding members, and the feedback suggested everyone was very interested, enthusiastic and supportive. Mr. Thy Long, Shallow Waters Community Liaison Officer, said 'people feel it's a very important issue for the community because they have known about these problems for a long time but haven't seen a solution to the problems so far. Years ago there was a small group who went around to arrest illegal fishing boats, but because they had no support from powerful members of the community or local officials such as the Navy they created problems with the officials, who then made their lives difficult.'



The enthusiasm was great to see and we are now in the process of training the 11 community members who voted to be founders, however we also need over 50% of the entire Koh Sdach community to support the official creation of the CFO or we won't be able to move forward, so we are creating materials and talking to people to explain the programme and collecting their support by having them thumbprint an official roster. The next workshop will take place in a few weeks to decide on a training programme and next steps for the creation of the CFO, exciting times!