Legal Aspects of the Coastal Zone Management: On-going Process of ICZM in Thailand

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"Coastal zone" is an area with interface between the land and the sea, and naturally contains unique character with multi-dimensional values, enjoyed by different users, based on different purposes, and finally led to conflicts among various stakeholders. To promote sustainable management of coastal zone as well as sustainable development, a new mechanism called "Integrated Coastal Zone Management or ICZM" was introduced for maintaining both "interdependence" between environment and development and "integration" of various measures, policies, processes, institutions and full public participation through coordinating mechanisms at both the local and national levels. ICZM is used by most coastal countries to ensure that all activities relating to the coast will harmoniously function to achieve common goals rather than replacing the traditional single-sector resources management. Thailand is on the process of introducing ICZM to the existing system.

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I. Introduction

A "coastal zone" is defined as the interface where land and sea meet. It is also known as a heavily exploited area due to its highly valued natural resources. These natural resources not only provide habitats for human settlements, local subsistence and economic development, but also support aquatic and terrestrial living organisms for their food, shelter and habitation. In coastal countries, the population in the coastal zones is increasing, which leads to more conflicts involving the resources used by different users for different purposes. As a result, coastal zones are under constant pressure, resulting in degradation which leads to negative social and economic consequences. To cope with these problems and related aspects such as the conflicts among various stakeholders and policies regulating overexploitation of resources, an effective mechanism is needed in order to maintain and restore the coastal zones, and coordinate different policies in managing the resources. In light of this, a new management system called the Integrated Coastal Zone Management ("ICZM") is being proposed for implementation in the national strategies of many coastal countries.

Coastal areas are significant resources for Thailand in terms of human settlement and economy. For example, major industries such as oil refineries and petrochemical plants are usually located along the coastline, especially on the east coast. Aquaculture, fisheries and tourism are also major economic activities in the coastal zones, contributing large amounts of income at both the local and national scales. Therefore, Thailand's economic activities are centered around these areas and thus, intensively put these areas under pressure. To withstand such pressure and fill gaps in the existing coastal management, ICZM is being introduced to Thailand as a new mechanism to protect the environment and to promote sustainable development of the coastal zone. This new mechanism includes cross-sectoral management, strategic environmental assessment and local community participation. To initiate ICZM in the Thai system, it is necessary to explore the relevant concepts of the coastal zone. After this comparative analysis, ICZM, as a new concept of management, needs to be well identified and finally, the method of applying such a management system must be developed.

II. Revisiting Concepts Relevant to the Coast

As a ramification of a shift from the old paradigm of "Freedom of the Sea" to the new