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Review of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan

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Draft NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Note by the Secretariat

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 was adopted by the 20th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-20) in 2015 through consultations at the SOM-19 in 2014 and a meeting of National Focal Points of NEASPEC in 2015. The NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 sets the goals, overall approaches and specific objectives and activities of NEASPEC's work in five programmatic areas identified by the member States, namely: transboundary air pollution, biodiversity and nature conservation, marine protected areas, low carbon cities, and desertification and land degradation.

2. The implementation of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 has resulted in strengthening and institutionalizing various cooperation platforms launched so far, namely the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN), the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP), and the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP). In addition, the work of NEASPEC on subregional flagship species and their habitats have strengthened scientific cooperation that could support transboundary coordination among member States.

3. To assess the implementation of the current Strategic Plan and develop the next Plan, the Secretariat prepared a preliminary evaluation for the consideration of the SOM-23, and subsequently conducted (a) a stakeholder survey receiving feedbacks from over 160 government officials and experts, and (b) an independent evaluation by reviewing NEASPEC documents, participating in meetings, and interviewing about 40 representatives from member governments, partners, ESCAP management and the Secretariat. The outcomes of the three evaluations were summarized in the Annex I, "Background for the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 (NEASPEC/NFP-2/1)", which was submitted to the National Focal Point Meeting held on 6 August 2020. This background document also presented NEASPEC's partnership with relevant mechanisms, and regional and global context of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

4. Based on the evaluations, the Secretariat prepared the first draft of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and presented it to the National Focal Point Meeting. While generally endorsing the draft, the Meeting suggested continuing to work with the existing five programmatic areas and provided specific inputs for the subregional context, the objectives and activities in each area. The Meeting also suggested to consider potential contribution of NEASPEC to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; potential synergies with relevant mechanisms; more focused approach and deepening cooperation; more practical targets and concrete actions; different conditions and capacities of member States and target groups; effectiveness and efficiency in addressing subregional priorities; and multidisciplinary and multistakeholder partnership.

5. The new Strategic Plan, thus, follows the programmatic areas outlined in the current Plan while keeping the flexibility for new programmatic areas, that can be developed if such

need is identified and consensus reached among member States. The Plan also provides the specific steps for strengthening the institutional support and monitoring and evaluation. After the Meeting, the Secretariat circulated a revised draft to the national focal points to receive additional feedback and confirmation, and prepared the following draft for the consideration of SOM-24.

II. STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

1. Introduction

Since 1993, **North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)** has served as a comprehensive intergovernmental cooperation framework in North-East Asia with membership of six countries: China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. NEASPEC has pursued a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach to address subregional environmental challenges.

The Framework for NEASPEC adopted at the third Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-3) in 1996 sets out the principal objective of the Programme as “to promote subregional environmental cooperation and sustainable development efforts for enhancement of quality of life and well-being of present and future generations”. Furthermore, the Vision Statement for NEASPEC adopted at SOM-6 in 2000 calls on member States to “promote common policy dialogue on approaches and views, and coordinated actions on subregional environmental issues”.

NEASPEC during 2010-2011 has strengthened the secretariat arrangement with ESCAP from interim to permanent following to the establishment of the ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. In this connection, after a study on challenges and opportunities of NEASPEC in 2012 and a series of consultations, the SOM-20 in 2016 adopted the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 to share a long-term view on the direction of NEASPEC and to enhance the efficiency of NEASPEC.

The Strategic Plan has served as a guiding document for developing and implementing NEASPEC work in five programmatic areas: (a) Transboundary Air Pollution; (b) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation; (c) Marine Protected Areas, (d) Low Carbon Cities, and (e) Desertification and Land Degradation. The Strategic Plan supports strengthening and institutionalizing cooperation platforms, namely, the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN), the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP), and the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP), which enable the NEASPEC work to move from short-term, project-based to long-term, programmatic approach. The approaches of the

Strategic Plan also support the NEASPEC work to become more strategic towards strengthening science-policy linkage, operating stakeholder platforms, sharing knowledge, and linking the work with regional and global goals.

Having built on the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and reflecting new development during its implementation, the programmatic areas of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 are (a) Air Pollution, (b) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation, (c) Marine Protected Areas, (d) Low Carbon Cities, and (e) Desertification and Land Degradation. While focusing on the five areas, the Strategic Plan may provide room for identifying other emerging issues of mutual interests among member States and support dialogue and cooperation on the issues. Thus, new programmatic areas can be explored and developed under the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 if such need is identified and consensus reached among member States.

Furthermore, the work of NEASPEC is expected to contribute member States' commitment to regional and global goals. In particular, the SOM-23 noted the views of member States on linking the next strategic plan with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The five programmatic areas are closely linked to one or more SDGs as shown in the following table (Table 1). Noting that the seventeen SDGs are interrelated and can enhance each other, each programmatic area is also indirectly linked and contribute to other SDGs.

Table 1. NEASPEC programmatic areas and their directly related SDGs

Air Pollution	
Goal 3.	Good health and well-being: substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and <u>air</u> , water and soil <u>pollution</u>
Goal11.	Sustainable Cities and Communities: reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to <u>air quality</u> and municipal and other waste management
Biodiversity and Nature Conservation	
Goal 6.	Clean water and sanitation: protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, <u>forests</u> , <u>wetlands</u> , rivers, aquifers and lakes; implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through <u>transboundary cooperation</u> as appropriate.
Goal 15.	Life on land: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of <u>terrestrial ecosystems</u> , sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and <u>halt biodiversity loss</u>
Marine Protected Areas	

Goal 14.	Life below water: conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, <u>sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems</u> to avoid significant adverse impacts
Low Carbon City	
Goal 11.	Sustainable Cities and Communities: <u>reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities</u> , increase number of cities adopting integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, <u>resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change...</u>
Goal 13.	Climate Action: improve human and institutional capacity on <u>climate change mitigation, adaptation</u> , impact reduction and early warning
Desertification and Land Degradation	
Goal 15.	Life on land: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, <u>sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation</u> and halt biodiversity loss

2. Subregional Context of NEASPEC Work

2.1. Air Pollution

Most NEASPEC member States have made significant progress in reducing sulfur oxide (SO_x) with improved policy and technical responses, and most recently other pollutants including nitrogen oxide (NO_x) and fine particulate matter (PM) while ground-level ozone is still increasing. While Japan has almost met the WHO standard by reducing the annual concentration of PM_{2.5} by over 60 percent from the early 2000s, other countries have recently intensified national actions as PM has been recognized as a key concern of public health. As such, countries have formulated comprehensive and bold action plans including “Air Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan (2013 – 2017)” and “Three-year Action Plan for Winning the Blue-Sky War” (2018-2020) of China, National Programme for Reducing Air and Environmental Pollution (2017-2025) of Mongolia, and the Comprehensive Plan for the Management of the Particulate Matter (2020-2024) of the Republic of Korea.

China with the first Action Plan brought down the annual average of PM_{2.5} concentration in 74 pilot cities by 42 percent to 42µg/m³, and in Beijing by 43 percent to 51µg/m³.¹ Mongolia decreased the level of PM_{2.5} in Ulaanbaatar by 56% during 2016-2019 to 113µg/m³ particularly by intensive policy measures and compliances on cleaner fuels.² The ROK during 2015-2018 also reduced the level of PM_{2.5} by 11 percent to 23µg/m³ with almost identical trend in Seoul.³

¹ Ministry of Ecology and Environment of China, 2019. Chia Air Quality Improvement Report (2013-2018)

² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mongolia, 2020. Communication with the NEASPEC Secretariat

³ Ministry of Environment, ROK, 2019. Comprehensive Plan for the Management of the Particulate Matter (2020-2024)

The drastic decreases in air pollution, particularly, PM, starting from Japan to other countries indicate the significance of stringent policy and technical measure, effective enforcement, and new technology deployment. In addition, the most recent experience in China highlights the important role of extensive air quality monitoring network including large scale urban sky-earth-space integrated monitoring network, and the inventory of air pollution sources for scientific and accurate control of pollutants.

However, most countries still face challenges in compliance with national standards, whilst addressing new challenges such as the increasing trend of tropospheric ozone (O₃), which is formed by a secondary photochemical process by ozone precursors, i.e. nitrogen oxides (NO_x), carbon monoxide (CO) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). The ineffective management of VOCs results in the increase of ozone while countries have reduced the NO_x emissions.

With the increasing domestic actions and interests in international cooperation, NEASPEC member States launched the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) in 2018 to promote science-based, policy-oriented cooperation. Having PM, O₃ and other relevant pollutants, including SO_x, NO_x, black carbon, ammonia (NH₃) and VOCs as the target pollutants, NEACAP is expected to facilitate (a) exchanging relevant information and data, (b) coordinating with relevant mechanisms and synthesizing their results, and (c) proposing potential technical and policy measures to tackle air pollution.

NEACAP is also expected to contribute the collective contribution of the member States to regional cooperation on air pollution in Asia and the Pacific. The launching of NEACAP initiated the adoption of the ESCAP resolution 75/4. *Strengthening regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific*⁴ in 2019, which encourages ESCAP member States to engage region-wide cooperation on air pollution.

2.2. Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

The Regional Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Asia and the Pacific in 2018 by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) noted the progress in forest management and protected area expansion and management in North-East Asia,⁵ benefiting both biodiversity and nature's contributions to people. NASA satellite data during 2000-2017 showed the contribution of North-East Asia, particularly China, to the expansion of the global green leaf area which increased by 5 percent. China accounted for 25 percent of the global net increase in green leaf area.⁶ However, significant land use changes associated with economic development and demographic change in North-East Asia have resulted in 36 percent of endemic species to face extinction risk.⁷ The

⁴ https://www.unescap.org/commission/75/document/E75_Res4E.pdf

⁵ North-East Asia in the IPBES assessment does not include the Russian Federation, but all other five countries.

⁶ Chen, et.al, 2019. China and India lead in greening of the world through land-use management, *Nature Sustainability*, 2, 122–129

⁷ IPBES, 2018. Regional Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Asia and the Pacific

IUCN Red List⁸ (Table 2) indicates the large number of threatened species (Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable categories) in North-East Asia, of which 8.38 percent of total animals are classified under threatened species.

Table 2. IUCN Red List: Threatened Species in Each Country

Country	Mammals	Birds	Reptiles*	Amphibians	Fishes*	Molluscs*	Other Inverts*	Plants*	Fungi & Protists*	Total*
China	74	96	47	88	146	15	69	631	6	1,172
DPRK	10	29	2	1	24	0	3	18	1	88
Japan	29	50	25	20	104	34	143	54	11	470
Mongolia	11	24	0	0	2	0	3	0	3	43
Republic of Korea	12	33	3	5	37	0	8	36	2	136
Russian Federation	34	57	9	0	41	7	31	64	36	279

(Last updated: 19 March 2020)

Note: */ Reptiles, fishes, molluscs, other invertebrates, plants, fungi & protists: please note that these groups have not yet been completely assessed. Therefore, the figures presented for these groups should be interpreted as the number of species known to be threatened within those species that have been assessed to date.

While member States improve domestic measures for biodiversity conservation, subregional or multilateral cooperation could focus on “connectivity conservation” that promotes enhancing ecological flows and corridors between protected areas and other patches of habitat to support species movement between fragmented habitats. In this regard, protected areas and intact habitats in transboundary areas can serve as the key focus of enhanced collaboration between NEASPEC member States on connectivity conservation.

In this regard, NEASPEC could continue to work on the conservation of its six flagship species, namely, Amur tiger (*Panther tigris altaica*), Amur leopard (*Panthera pardus orientalis*), Snow leopard (*Panthera uncia*), Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), White-naped Crane (*Grus vipio*) and Hooded Crane (*Grus monachus*), which was identified by the Nature Conservation Strategy in 2007⁹. These species do not necessarily inhabit the territories of all NEASPEC member States. However, they connect multiple countries into one ecologically borderless community. Their ecological characteristics have significant potential in bringing multilateral actions to conserve wider habitats and biodiversity.

Furthermore, NEASPEC connects its work with the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework that pursue action-oriented targets under (a) reducing threats to biodiversity, (b) meeting people’s needs through sustainable use and benefit-sharing, and (c) tools and solutions for implementation and mainstreaming. The Framework aims to put biodiversity on a path to

⁸ IUCN, 2020. Threatened species in each country

<https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/summary-statistics#Summary%20Tables>

⁹ http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf

recovery for the benefit of planet and people by 2030 and achieve no net loss in the area and integrity of freshwater, marine and terrestrial ecosystems.¹⁰

2.3. Marine Protected Areas

The interface of biodiversity and people's need is also an important aspect for managing marine areas in North-East Asia. China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation are among the world largest marine capture producers, accounting for over 25 per cent of the world production. Three countries excluding the Russian Federation are also major players in aquaculture production and among the top 15 producers of the world. Furthermore, many intertidal flats in the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea, providing essential nursery and fishing grounds, are internationally important wetlands as key habitats of migratory birds and provide important ecosystem services as well as livelihoods.

Fish is also an important part of the animal protein intake for the population in the subregion, particularly in Japan and the Korean peninsula, where the animal protein intake from fish is as high as some countries in the Pacific islands. The importance of fishery resources also highlights the challenge of balancing the biodiversity and conservation objectives and sustainable use of marine resources. Even in well protected areas in the subregion, many issues identified in managing the area are rooted to the question of balancing the anthropocentric impacts, including legal and illegal fishing in and around the sites, linkages of socio-economic aspects with the plans and implementation of the site management for maintaining ecosystem.

In this connection, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) play a catalytic role in conserving representative samples of biological diversity and associated ecosystems for long-term viability of marine environment and showcasing the ecosystem approach for managing the marine areas. MPAs restrict human activities to protect ecologically critical sites for reproduction and growth of species, serve as focal points and reference sites for education and research on marine environment, and provide grounds for sustainable use of marine areas such as nature-based tourism and other economic activities. For these reasons, North-East Asian countries have established a large number of MPAs at various administration and legislations with significant variations in terms of characteristics, purposes, institutional settings and regulations in each country's MPAs.

However, all NEASPEC member States have not reached the Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 nor the SDG Target 14.5, which both set the goal of at least 10 percent of coastal and marine areas to be protected areas. It would partly reflect the importance of the marine areas as fishery ground, linking to the challenge of meeting the qualitative goal of the Aichi Target 11, which is to conserve "through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and

¹⁰ <https://www.cbd.int/doc/c/efb0/1f84/a892b98d2982a829962b6371/wg2020-02-03-en.pdf>

well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures”.

Thus, NEASPEC continues to promote sharing of experiences among and across countries in effective management of MPAs consistent with ecosystem approach, despite the variation in sizes, ecological and geographical context.

2.4. Low Carbon Cities

Global carbon emissions continue to grow, except the time of the global scale shocks such as financial crisis and recent COVID-19 pandemic. NEASPEC member States include four of the top 10 global carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitters and leading sources of low carbon technologies and practices. Thus, they have a critical role in changing the trend and speed of climate change. Although carbon intensity per GDP is significantly declining in North-East Asia, the scale of economic expansion overwhelms such trend. In addition, despite the improvement of energy efficiency, per capita CO₂ is increasing, and stay far higher than the world average in all countries (except DRPK) in the subregion. On the other hand, various initiatives for reducing GHG emissions in North-East Asian countries can (i) showcase their experiences and share lessons learned among the subregion and beyond and (ii) potentially lead to the reduction of global GHG emissions.

In particular, the process of formulating and communicating “long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LEDS)”¹¹ according to the Paris Agreement (Article 4.19) is expected to further strengthen the existing targets under the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) (Table 3). For example, Japan aims to accomplish a “decarbonized society” by reducing 80 percent GHG emissions by 2050 under the LEDS. Apart from sector-specific reduction policies and measures in energy, industry, transport, and residential, the Japan LT-LEDS plans to develop policies for securing sufficient carbon sinks (natural environment conservation, sustainable agriculture, forestry and fisheries), and cross-cutting measures such as innovation, green finance, and business-led international cooperation.¹²

Table 3. Nationally Determined Contribution of NEASPEC Member Countries on GHG emissions

China	DPRK	Japan	Mongolia	ROK	Russian Federation
By 2030: • the peaking of CO ₂ emissions by around 2030 (with best efforts to peak earlier) • To lower per GDP CO ₂	[BAU Scenario] GHG emission projections: 187.73 million tCO ₂ e. in 2030. [Unconditional contribution] To	26.0% reduction by fiscal year (FY) 2030 compared to FY 2013 (25.4% reduction compared to FY 2005) (approximately	Approximately 14% reduction (7.3 MtCO ₂ -eq.) by 2030, compared to a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, excluding LULUCF	37% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 from BAU scenario (BAU, 850.6 MtCO ₂ -eq. in 2030)	(Intended NDC) Reduction of GHG to 70-75% by 2030 from 1990 levels

¹¹ The COP, by its decision 1/CP 21, paragraph 35, invited Parties to communicate, by 2020, to the secretariat mid-century, long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in accordance with Article 4, paragraph 19, of the Paris Agreement. See <https://unfccc.int/process/the-paris-agreement/long-term-strategies>.

¹² Japan submitted “The Long-term Strategy under the Paris Agreement” in June 2019, <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/The%20Long-term%20Strategy%20under%20the%20Paris%20Agreement.pdf>

emissions by 60% to 65% from the 2005 level	reduce GHG emissions by 8.0% by 2030 [Conditional contribution] Further reduction by 32.25% if international support is received	1.042 billion t-CO ₂ eq. as 2030 emissions)			
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Source: UNFCCC NDC Interim Registry <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/All.aspx>

Amongst various policy initiatives, many NEASPEC member States have developed and implemented policies to support city-level actions on mitigating GHG emissions considering the roles of cities as both key emission sources and testing ground of new and innovative policies such as green transport and building. In this connection, NEASPEC identified sharing information and knowledge on low carbon cities and supporting municipal authorities as a practical area of cooperation to address climate change. The initial work focused on low carbon city policies in three member States, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (Table 4). The SOM-23 in 2019 became a milestone in expanding the work to other member States, namely Mongolia and the Russian Federation.

Table 4: Low Carbon City Policies and Actions in China, Japan, and Republic of Korea

	China	Japan	Republic of Korea
Flagship programme or framework	<p>Low Carbon Pilot Cities (as of 2020, 6 provinces, 81 cities and 2 counties)</p> <p>Target Responsibility System (TRS) policy implementation mechanism that assigns national targets to local government and requires the latter to be responsible for achieving the assigned target</p>	<p>Model city development: promotes low carbon city development through a set of certification programs including the Eco model city, Future City, SDG Future City, and Local Government SDGs Model Programmes</p>	<p>Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth (FALCGG) - Pilot programs to promote low carbon cities, including the Climate Change Adaptation Model City Project; the Green City Project</p> <p>Local Government Alliance for Carbon Neutral: a voluntary network involving 80 municipal governments for carbon neutral by 2050</p>

The work under the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) indicates uneven capacity of cities to address low carbon city development and competing priorities of the cities within the limited resources and capacities. Those findings suggest the need for cities to explore the policies which embrace co-benefits between climate action and economy, and between GHG mitigation and air quality improvement. In this context, NEASPEC’s NEA-LCCP can strengthen its role in connecting the experiences and expertise of local governments.

The work of NEA-LCCP will be connected with, and draw expertise from networks and programmes at regional and international levels including ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40), Asian Cities Climate Change

Resilience Network (ACCCRN), the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), and the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA).

2.5. Desertification and Land Degradation

The NEASPEC work desertification and land degradation (DLD) is expected to focus on the interlinkage with climate change.¹³ As the world's soils store more carbon than the planet's biomass and atmosphere combined, appropriate land management is urgently in need to increase soil carbon stocks that can offset the anthropogenic GHG emissions and generate multiple benefits for both the environment and society. Changes in land conditions, either from land-use or climate change, affect globally and regional climate. Agriculture, forestry and other land use activities accounted for around 13 percent of CO₂, 44 percent of methane (CH₄), and 82 percent of nitrous oxide (N₂O) emissions from human activities globally during 2007-2016. Meanwhile, climate change creates additional stress on land, exacerbating existing risks to livelihoods, biodiversity, human and ecosystem health, infrastructure, and food systems.

Many land-related responses to climate change adaptation and mitigation produce co-benefits to combat desertification and land degradation, and vice versa. Such responses also contribute to halting biodiversity loss with sustainable development co-benefits to society. Sustainable land management, in particular, can prevent and reduce land degradation, and maintain land productivity, whilst contributing to mitigation and adaptation of climate change. Reducing and reversing desertification and land degradation, at scales from individual farms to entire watersheds and even to the whole country, can provide cost effective, immediate, and long-term benefits to communities and support SDGs with co-benefits for adaptation and mitigation.

The *Special Report on Climate Change, Desertification, Land Degradation, Sustainable Land Management, Food Security, and Greenhouse Gas Fluxes in Terrestrial Ecosystems* of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published in August 2019 offers an integrated analysis of the interactions, co-benefits and trade-offs between DLD and climate change.¹⁴ Land degradation is both affected by and contributes to climate change through GHG emissions and reduced rates of carbon uptake. Desertification exacerbates climate change through changes in vegetation cover, dust aerosols and GHG fluxes. In the meantime, climate change intensifies the rate and magnitude of land degradation processes and introduces new degradation patterns. Thus, the Report notes that many interventions to achieve land degradation neutrality (LDN) commonly deliver benefits for climate change adaptation and

¹³ The 22nd and 23rd SOMs reviewed the existing work of NEASPEC on desertification and land degradation and relevant intergovernmental process in the subregion. The SOMs decided to refocus the work by addressing the interlinkage with climate change,

¹⁴ "Land degradation" is defined in IPCC SRCCL as a negative trend in land condition, caused by direct or indirect human-induced processes including anthropogenic climate change, expressed as long-term reduction or loss of at least one of the following: biological productivity, ecological integrity or value to humans. The difference between land degradation and desertification is geographic. "Desertification" is land degradation when it occurs in arid, semi-arid, and dry sub-humid areas, collectively known as drylands. Desertification is not the same as the expansion of deserts, also note limited to irreversible forms of land degradation.

mitigation. The CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework also identifies contributions to the Paris Climate Agreement as one of five long-term goals for 2050.

Amongst NEASPEC member States, restoring degraded lands (including degraded forest) is among the most cost-effective option for climate change mitigation with multiple co-benefits in Mongolia and DPRK. As the agriculture, forestry and land use change in Mongolia and DPRK represent about 70 and 30 percent of the total national GHG emissions, respectively, programmes with co-benefits have significant contributions.

Such programmes identified in the IPCC Report include building individual and institutional capacity, accelerating knowledge transfer, enhancing technology transfer and deployment, enabling financial mechanisms, implementing early warning systems, undertaking risk management, and addressing gaps in implementation and upscaling.

3. Strategic Goals and Approaches

3.1. Goals

- (a) Enhance science-based, policy-oriented cooperation to address subregional environmental challenges
- (b) Mobilize mutual support to manage domestic environmental issues in member States
- (c) Contribute to the implementation of national, regional and global goals for sustainable development, in particular, environment-related Sustainable Development Goals

3.2. Approaches

- (a) Develop and implement joint actions promoting science-policy linkages in each programmatic area
- (b) Focus on joint actions to maximize the efficiency and impact of subregional cooperation
- (c) Support knowledge sharing and capacity development among member governments and other stakeholders as appropriate
- (d) Operate effective platforms and networks for member governments and other major stakeholders to enhance subregional environmental cooperation and coordinated actions
- (e) Identify and enhance potential linkages between NEASPEC and subregional programmes and regional and global goals

4. Objectives and Activities

4.1. Air Pollution

- **Objectives:**
 - By 2025, develop the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership to be fully-functioning by facilitating information sharing, joint study, and policy and technology cooperation among member States.
- **Activities:**
 - Implement priority areas and activities agreed by member States
 - Encourage the exchange of information to support collaboration among scientific and academic communities
 - Promote wider participation of stakeholders in subregional cooperation on tackling air pollution
 - Liaise with multilateral, regional and global mechanisms on air pollution for building synergies with relevant activities

4.2. Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

- **Objectives:**
 - By 2025, build and/or strengthen institutional arrangements on the conservation of flagship species¹⁵ and their habitats in support of the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy¹⁶, national biodiversity strategy and action plan, the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework and the SDG 15.
- **Activities:**
 - Support strengthening bilateral, multilateral and multistakeholder cooperation, for institutionalizing cross-border and connectivity conservation between national protected areas including protected wetlands in the Tumen River area
 - Facilitate capacity building and knowledge sharing on ecosystem approach/management in habitats and protected areas of the flagship species
 - Facilitate capacity building and knowledge sharing on the conservation of flagship species, including monitoring and prevention of wildlife diseases
 - Liaise with multilateral, regional and global mechanisms on biodiversity and nature conservation and develop partnership activities

¹⁵ Identified by the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy and further consultations by member States.

¹⁶ Saving the Flagship Species of North-East Asia: Nature Conservation Strategic of NEASPEC, 2007, http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files//Publication_SavingNatureConservation_1.pdf

4.3. Marine Protected Areas

- **Objectives:**
 - By 2025, develop NEAMPAN to be fully functional for strengthening partnerships among target MPAs and stakeholders and enhancing capacity to achieve, inter alia, the SDG 14 and relevant goals associated with marine and coastal biodiversity in a holistic manner.
- **Activities:**
 - Facilitate the exchange of knowledge, information, experiences and good practices with regard to strengthen MPA management effectiveness
 - Facilitate cooperation on the protection of endangered and rare migratory marine species
 - Cooperate with existing partnerships to maximize the synergy with various initiatives at national, (sub-)regional and global level in capacity-building and technical assistance in support of on-the-ground implementation priorities
 - Enhance interactive communication among policy makers, scientific community and local stakeholders to promote ecosystem approach for MPA management.

4.4. Low Carbon Cities

- **Objectives:**
 - By 2025, develop the NEA-LCCP to be a fully functional platform to support communications and cooperation among stakeholders, and promote awareness and capacity for developing and implementing low carbon city plans
- **Activities:**
 - Facilitate sharing information and experience in policies and measures on low carbon city policies
 - Enhance mutual technical assistance for strengthening capacity to effectively implement low carbon city approach
 - Provide recommendations and technical support through linking, mobilizing and connecting expert networks
 - Conduct analytical studies to identify gaps, generate practical knowledge and address specific conditions and capacities for LCC development

4.5. Desertification and Land Degradation

- **Objectives:**
 - By 2025, implement pilot studies and raise awareness on interlinkages between climate change mitigation and desertification and land degradation (DLD) to develop an integrated approach
- **Activities:**
 - Conduct a stock-taking study on the interlinkage of climate change mitigation and DLD such as soil organic carbon and management of grassland and forest participated by national experts
 - Develop a subregional approach and organize activities on nature-based solutions for addressing climate change and DLD
 - Hold stakeholder dialogues on the interlinkages and nature-based solutions

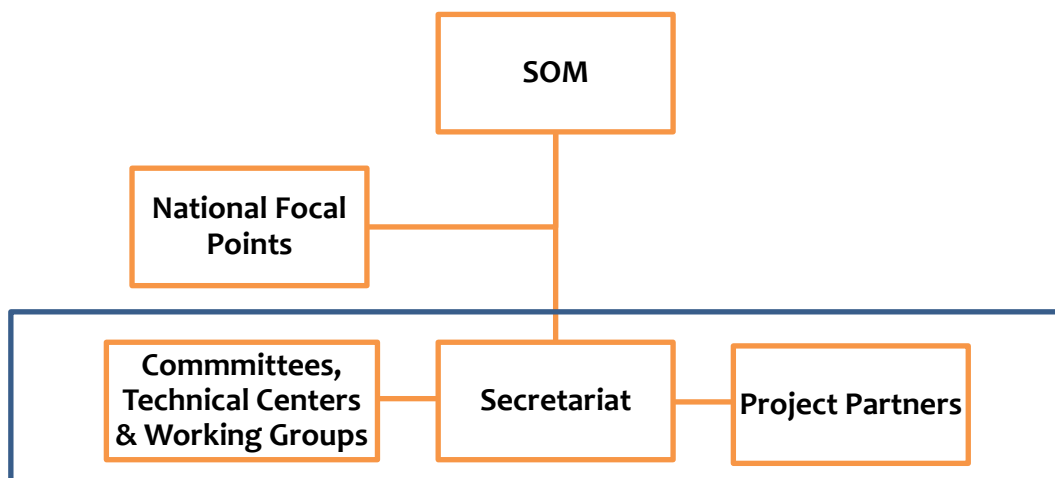
4.6. Other emerging issues

- **Objectives:**
 - Build mutual understanding among member States on emerging issues of subregional environmental cooperation and develop the plan of joint action.
- **Activities:**
 - Facilitate dialogue among member States on emerging issues upon the request from member States, Secretariat or other relevant stakeholders
 - Conduct a study on the identified issues, if required, to support policy dialogue and joint action

5. Institutional Arrangement

5.1. Overall Direction

- Increase ownership of member States by encouraging participation of national institutions and other stakeholders in programme development and implementation
- Strengthen linkages and coordination with other relevant initiatives of member States for enhanced effectiveness
Enhance institutional, technical and financial contributions of member States to NEASPEC



5.2. Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)

- Further improve the effectiveness of its primary function as the governing body of NEASPEC with the proper level of representations from member States
- Promote SOM as a key subregional platform for joint review and dialogue among major stakeholders on subregional environmental cooperation

5.3. Secretariat

- Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat in programme management and communication with the member governments and stakeholders
- Strengthen the secretariat capacity including through the secondment of national experts to the Secretariat
- Supplement the Secretariat capacity by enhancing the role of committees, working groups and national institutions in programme development and implementation

5.4. Committees and Working Groups

- Support the effective operation of the existing committees, NEACAP Science and Policy Committee, and NEAMPAN Steering Committee, as the main instrument for planning and implementing work in their respective area in accordance with the agreed mandates
- Develop committees and/or working groups in other thematic areas if deemed necessary
- Delegate proper authority and provide support to the national members of committees and working groups for making the institutional arrangement fully functional

5.5. Financial Resources

- Improve financial resources of NEASPEC by ensuring more stable and predictable national contributions to the Core Fund
- Mobilize financial resources and in-kind contributions from diverse sources of member States as appropriate
- Build partnership with national and international institutions, and civil society organizations to diversify the modality of financial and in-kind contributions
- Encourage participation of stakeholder groups and self-financing of beneficiaries to participate in the programme.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of programme implementation and secretariat operation will be carried out through the annual Senior Officials Meeting and the internal progress review of ESCAP.

At the SOM, monitoring will include the current progress reporting of the work at the annual meeting to review the implementation of approved projects and activities; to discuss and decide on new areas and projects; and to ensure appropriate participation of relevant stakeholders from member States in programme planning and implementation.

Evaluation will include the assessment of project outcomes and recommendations, through project review meetings that include project partners and wider stakeholder groups, which will also be reported to SOM. Goals and activities of each thematic area and project can be revised according to the feedbacks from major stakeholders and to be decided by relevant Committee and/or SOM.

In addition to the monitoring and evaluation by SOM, ESCAP regularly reviews the progress in programme to ensure its implementation in accordance with the plan and secretariat operation to ensure its compliance with the UN rules and regulations.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

6. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to adopt the revised draft NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025, and to raise the level of ambition and scale up support in operationalizing the NEASPEC Strategic Plan to deliver tangible results.

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