

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Twenty-second Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

25-26 October 2018

Beijing, China

**REPORT OF THE TWENTY-SECOND SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING
OF THE NORTH-EAST ASIAN SUBREGIONAL PROGRAMME FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL COOPERATION**

1. The Twenty-Second Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC was held in Beijing on 25-26 October 2018. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) East and North-East Asia Office serving as NEASPEC Secretariat and was generously hosted by the Government of China.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Meeting commended the progress in implementing activities in five programme areas while noting the importance of building synergies with relevant national, subregional, regional institutions and organizations, and multilateral programmes. The Meeting underlined the linkages of NEASPEC with global goals including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement. The Meeting also emphasized the significance of results-oriented projects; knowledge and experiences sharing; and the need for further strengthening cooperation among member States on subregional environmental challenges.

3. **Transboundary Air Pollution:** The Meeting formally launched the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) by endorsing the proposed Terms of Reference that was agreed by the Consultation Meeting in October 2017. The Meeting also noted the plan of member States for nominating two members of the Science and Policy Committee (SPC) and welcomed the announcement of the Republic of Korea for hosting the first meeting of the SPC.

4. **Nature Conservation:** The Meeting commended the concrete outcomes from the three projects on transborder movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards, habitats for key migratory birds and the Dauria International Protected Area (DIPA), and supported the proposed activities on the habitat

management of transboundary areas including a workshop in Yanji in March 2019. The Meeting also encouraged DPRK to participate in the planned activities noting that DPRK has recently become the member of the Ramsar Convention and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP).

5. **Marine Protected Areas:** The Meeting supported the plan of the North-East Asia Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) activities, notably the plan of holding a Steering Committee meeting in China and an expert meeting in December 2018 in the ROK for the project on the sustainable management of MPAs. The Meeting also noted the request of the Secretariat for the nomination of Steering Committee members and institutions/experts for the project at their earliest convenience. Considering the need for expanding the target MPAs, the Meeting welcomed the announcement of the ROK for nominating one more target MPA (Gochang Wetland Protected Areas) and the collaboration between NEASPEC and other relevant programmes, i.e., NOWPAP and YSLME. The Meeting encouraged DPRK to join the activities of NEAMPAN.

6. **Low Carbon Cities:** The Meeting noted the progress in the low carbon pilot cities and provinces of China with the latest third batch as well as programmes of other member States relevant to low carbon cities. The Meeting commended the significant benefits and progress in the peer review of low carbon cities, and, in particular, the outcome and plan of the review for Wuhan and Guangzhou city, respectively. The Meeting also requested other member Governments to nominate their respective cities for peer review, and to find opportunities to participate in the LCC activities.

7. **Desertification and Land Degradation (DLD):** The Meeting was briefed on the current progress made by member States on land degradation neutrality (LDN) voluntary target setting and combating desertification. The Meeting welcomed the sharing of national experience from China on combating desertification, stressing the need on securing the compliance of local governments and engagement of local communities. The Meeting also noted that DLD remains to be a prominent challenge in the subregion, while recognizing the importance of avoiding duplication with existing mechanisms such as the Northeast Asia Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN). The Meeting highlighted the need to create synergies and enable cooperation with other mechanisms and programmes such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Taking into account the views expressed by member States, the Meeting requested the Secretariat to develop a new plan that refocuses the work of NEASPEC on DLD.

8. **External evaluation:** The Meeting agreed the plan of the external evaluation in an open and transparent manner and suggested taking into account the ongoing process of the UN Development System reform. The Meeting requested the Secretariat to share draft terms of reference with national focal points for incorporating views of member States.

9. **Core Fund:** The Meeting appreciated the financial contributions of member States to the Core Fund as well as the Project-based Fund and noted the contributions of US\$ 50,000 from China in 2018, and the US\$ 100,000 from the ROK to the Core Fund to be transferred in November 2018. The Meeting noted the intended plan of the ROK for an additional contribution in support of the NEACAP in 2019. The Meeting also encouraged diversifying and broadening sources of funding, and noted suggestions from member States on possible projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other relevant mechanisms. Japan reaffirmed the in-kind contributions through the sharing of know-how and best practices. The Meeting noted and approved the proposed budget plan.

10. **Plan for the Next SOM:** The Meeting welcomed the invitation of the Mongolian delegation to

host SOM-23 tentatively in September 2019 and noted that the venue and time will be communicated with the Secretariat in due course.

11. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the host government for its excellent arrangements and for its warm hospitality extended to all participants. The Chair expressed his appreciation to the Secretariat for its preparatory work for the SOM-22 and thanked delegations for their active and dedicated participation at the Meeting.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTY-SECOND SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING

A. Attendance

12. The Meeting was attended by delegations from China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, together with experts and representatives of the UN agencies and international organizations¹.

B. Opening session

13. The Senior Officials Meeting was opened by Mr. Sangmin Nam, Interim Head of the ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office. He welcomed delegates and expressed gratitude to the Government of China for the excellent meeting arrangements and highlighted the significant progress achieved in combating air pollutions in China. Commending the NEASPEC for its 25th anniversary since the UN Conference on Environment and Development, he said NEASPEC has fledged into a critical subregional platform aligning the common interests among member governments and other stakeholders to develop concrete actions and outcomes on air pollution, climate change and biodiversity as a joint environmental community. He stressed durable and action-oriented partnership with enhanced institutional and financial support is key to the future success of NEASPEC.

14. The welcoming remark from the host Government was delivered by Mr. WANG Xiaolong, Director-General, Department of International Economic Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Regarding NEASPEC as a timely and responsive mechanism to the common environmental concerns of the subregion with fruitful cooperation programs, he suggested member States scaling up the current collaboration and taking the lead in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also suggested member States making full use of NEASPEC to improving global environmental governance, especially to strengthen the communication and cooperation on the implementation of the Paris Agreement and other international environmental conventions, adding that China will promote more vigorous international environmental cooperation with continuous contribution on international environmental governance.

¹ Please see Annex I – List of participants for details.

C. Election of officers

15. The Meeting elected the following officers:

Chair:	Mr. HUANG Yiyang (China)
Vice-Chair:	Mr. Tong-q LEE (Republic of Korea)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Enkhbat ALTANGEREL (Mongolia)

D. Adoption of the agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
 - a) Opening remarks by the Head of ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office
 - b) Welcoming remarks by the Head of Delegation of the Host Government
2. Election of officers
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Statements by delegations of member States, and UN and international organizations on matters related to sustainable development in North-East Asia
5. Review of programme planning and implementation
 - Transboundary Air Pollution
 - Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas
 - Marine Protected Areas
 - Low Carbon Cities
 - Desertification and Land Degradation
6. External Evaluation of NEASPEC
7. Review of the Core Fund
8. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the Twenty-Third SOM
9. Other issues
10. Adoption of the conclusion and recommendations of the Meeting

E. Policy issues for sustainable development in North-East Asia

(Agenda item 4)

16. The representative of China underlined that countries in the subregion remain facing serious challenges caused by unbalanced and inadequate development and further efforts are needed to promote the environment and to achieve quality and sustainable development. He introduced that under the leading framework of the ecological civilization China has become an important participant, contributor and torchbearer in the global efforts for implementing

the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Saying that NEASPEC can play a critical role in helping the subregion shift to a sustainable development pathway, he suggested (1) doubling the efforts under NEASPEC to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement, stressing that China is willing to share experience and opportunities with NEASPEC countries; (2) strengthening cooperation on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a new and compatible platform for international cooperation for sustainable development, encouraging NEASPEC member States make full use of BRI to promote domestic actions on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; and (3) scaling up project cooperation including developing new projects through additional funding channels in addition to the Core Fund established in 2001.

17. The representative of DPRK introduced that his government attaches great importance to protecting the environment and is interested in learning the experiences of NEASPEC member States in the past years on sustainable development.
18. The representative of Japan informed the Meeting of the national efforts and progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including an SDG Implementation Guideline focusing on climate change, ecosystem conservation and biodiversity, and the empowerment of women and youth. He said the Ministry of the Environment has been pursuing policies and strategies that simultaneously benefit the growth of environmental quality and the economy, such as the expansion of renewable energies, resource efficiency in business, environmental, social and governance (ESG) investment and environmental financing. Considering the importance of environmental technology and infrastructure in achieving the SDGs, he suggested utilizing Japanese technologies in the areas of sound waste management, marine ecosystem protection, marine plastic waste management, noting that Japan will develop a plastic recycling strategy before hosting the next G20 in 2019.
19. The representative of Mongolia pointed out that climate change, air pollution and land degradation are the primary environmental challenges faced by his country with the increasingly impacts on key sectors and the livelihoods of the population. He highlighted the Mongolian National Green Development Plan, the Sustainable Development Vision 2030 and the Sustainable Outlook of Mongolia supported by ESCAP as a systemic approach to address the key environmental challenges. Mongolia as an active member and partner in implementing NEASPEC projects, he commended the unique value of NEASPEC for promoting transboundary environmental protection and cooperation and informed the hosting of the 23rd Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC in 2019.
20. The representative of the Republic of Korea considered the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement as two global regimes presenting immense challenges along with historical opportunities. He commended NEASPEC as an active platform for environmental cooperation and noted a great opportunity for NEASPEC with the changing political situation in the subregion. With regard to SDGs, he introduced the work of the ROK government on the formulation of K-SDGs and stakeholder participation in the process. He commended DPRK's accession to the Ramsar Convention and the EAAFP and underscored the need to scale up progress on air pollution to the entire region.
21. The representative of the Russian Federation echoed on the achievements of NEASPEC and

called for continued institutional and financial support including that from ESCAP and the member States to enable tangible collaboration on the 2030 Agenda and to make the programme open and inclusive one. He highlighted the national efforts on transboundary protected areas, public engagement, waste management and clean energy production, and committed continued financial and other supports to NEASPEC, and underscored the importance of NEASPEC's better publicity.

F. Presentations and discussions on substantive agenda items

(Agenda items 5, 6, and 7)

22. The Meeting heard presentations from the Secretariat on agenda item 5: Review of programme planning and implementation; agenda item 6: External Evaluation of NEASPEC; and agenda item 7: Review of the Core Fund, followed by interventions from member States, international organizations and experts. Key outcomes of discussions on the agenda items are included in the Conclusions and Recommendations in Section I of the Report of the Meeting.

Agenda item 5 a) Transboundary Air Pollution

23. The Meeting noted the historical progress in subregional cooperation on air pollution achieved under NEASPEC and the latest development regarding the draft Terms of Reference of NEACAP agreed at the consultation meeting in 2017. The ROK representative proposed to adopt the draft TOR of NEACAP and appreciated the Government of the Russian Federation for the initiative. He also indicated the possibility of additional financial contributions to NEASPEC in support of NEACAP and expressed the interest in hosting the first meeting of the Science and Policy Committee. The representative of Mongolia supported the launching of NEACAP and indicated the nomination of experts for the SPC. He also expressed the expectation on facilitating technical cooperation and public awareness raising through NEACAP.
24. The representative of China introduced the work of the new Ministry of Ecology and Environment and noted the draft TOR as collective wisdom and efforts, thereby supporting the launching of NEACAP. The representative of Japan highlighted the rich experiences in air pollution reduction and expressed Japan's agreement with the TOR and contribution to NEACAP activities by sharing knowledge. He also underscored the importance of avoiding duplication with relevant mechanisms. In support of NEACAP, the representative of the Russian Federation confirmed the plan for nominating the SPC members, technical center and financial support.
25. The Meeting had an intervention from the representative of ICLEI who suggested NEACAP to place more connection with city level intervention to ensure its implementation. Further to the adoption of the TOR, the Secretariat informed the plan of circulating the required qualification and nomination form for the SPC members.

Agenda item 5 b) Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas

26. The Meeting noted the progress achieved by NEASPEC in joint work on the protection of

Amur together and leopard, and the migratory birds and their habitats, respectively. The representative of China introduced the work of the new National Forestry and Grassland Administration and the National Park Administration and emphasized on the need to further cooperate with countries in the subregion. The ROK representative suggested expanding the project activities to DPRK and supported the proposed workshop on transboundary nature conservation in 2019 with more information provided. He also welcomed the accession of DPRK to the Ramsar Convention and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP).

27. The representative of the Russian Federation confirmed the continuation of support to the projects on Amur tiger and leopard and on migratory birds, and stated support on the proposed workshop in 2019, noting that NEASPEC has been able to deliver concrete and tangible outcomes with rising visibilities. The representative of Mongolia emphasized the importance of nature conservation in transboundary areas and supported the proposed workshop. The representative of Japan also noted the substantive progress achieved by NEASPEC on generating new data that is critical for the conservation of the flagship species and their habitats in the subregion and emphasized the importance of complementarity and synergies with existing programmes and initiatives.

Agenda item 5 c) Marine Protected Areas

28. The Meeting noted the activities of NEAMPAN including (i) the International Seminar on MPAs in YSLME and North East Asia (2017) and (ii) Project on “Strengthening the Subregional Cooperation through Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Management of Marine Protected Areas” funded by the Russian Federation. The representative of the Russian Federation confirmed to continue the support for this programmatic area of NEASPEC.
29. The representative of ROK informed the Meeting about the recent initiative to increase the number of MPAs by 5 sites as part of the national efforts towards the implementation of SDG Goal14. In this connection, he announced the plan to nominate additional MPA as a NEAMPAN site. The representative of China introduced the recent institutional reform and the reassignment of MPA related responsibilities to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and took note of the Secretariat’s request to inform any change of the Steering Committee members. The representative of Mongolia pointed out that the national experts on large lakes and rivers management could benefit from the training and experience sharing in NEAMPAN.
30. The Meeting had presentations by the representatives of NOWPAP and YSLME, and noted potential areas of collaboration with relevant networks, including the NOWPAP project on “Identification of key indicator species and ecosystems of biodiversity change in the NOWPAP region”, and the planned work of YSLME Project on marine protected area network YSLME Project and a workshop on migratory species (such as spotted seals).

Agenda item 5 d) Low Carbon Cities

31. The Meeting noted the progress on the pilot peer reviews and the comparative studies on low

carbon cities and the experience shared by pilot cities. The representative of the Wuhan Development and Reform Commission highlighted Wuhan's experiences in developing the low carbon action plan to reduce GHG emissions in major contributing sectors in line with the national and local socio-economic development strategies. The representative of Guangzhou Municipal Development and Reform Commission stressed that decoupling energy demand and emission levels from local economic growth remains to be the key challenge despite the reduction of CO₂ emission per GDP by 40% at the 2010 level over the past years and supported the planned peer review.

32. The representative of China introduced the national efforts on combating climate change and the expansion of cities and provinces participating in the national low carbon pilot scheme, noting that the experience shared with other countries under LCCP is beneficial to address the various challenges at the city level. The representative of Mongolia highlighted the severe air pollution faced by many cities in Mongolia and expressed interest in joining the partnership on LCC and particularly to learn from the experience of China.
33. The representative of Japan introduced the national commitment to low carbon city development, and highlighted relevant initiatives including collaboration with IGES to develop the Asia-Pacific Integrated Model for city planning. The representative of the Russian Federation pointed out energy efficiency in heating was a key issue discussed at ECE's Committee on Energy and expressed that mayors of Russian cities are expected to join the LCCP meetings to share experiences. The representative of ROK suggested that integrated monitoring and assessment for low carbon city development could be more beneficial for other cities when sharing experiences.
34. The project partner, iGDP expressed its continued support to the LCCP through collaborative activities on peer reviews and comparative studies.

Agenda item 5 e) Desertification and Land Degradation

35. The Meeting noted the multifaceted challenges faced by member States and globally and centered the discussion on the proposed options on the way forward. The representative of China introduced the national plan and efforts and stated its support to share national experiences with other countries. He suggested NEASPEC to avoid duplication and seeking for synergies and cooperation with existing mechanisms as a high-level coordinating body and indicated that China would be interested in supporting NEASPEC activities building on the bi- and multi-lateral cooperation channels.
36. The representative of the Russian Federation suggested continuing DLD related work under NEASPEC and utilizing the regional office and knowledge management tools under the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) regarding sustainable soil management with the possibility of financing new NEASPEC projects. The ROK representative suggested avoiding duplication and directing NEASPEC to work towards synergies with existing mechanisms such as DLDD-NEAN and UNCCD.
37. The representative of Mongolia noted the possible duplication and suggested exploring pathways that NEASPEC could continue DLD work to enhance the existing efforts and

support joint projects. The representative of Japan also recognized the duplication of activities if carried out as before under NEASPEC and suggested information on the progress under other mechanisms be made available as input to refocus the activities undertaken by NEASPEC in the future.

Agenda item 6 External Evaluation of NEASPEC

38. The Meeting considered the plan for systemically evaluate the relevance and effectiveness of NEASPEC in fulfilling its mandate in the current institutional setting. The representatives of China and ROK underscored the need to carry out the external evaluation in an open and transparent manner. The representative of China suggested the evaluation to take into account the ongoing process of the UN Development System reform. The representative of Mongolia supported the proposal on the external evaluation. The representative of Japan sought for clarification regarding the financial and human resources implications to conduct the external evaluation. The representative of the Russian Federation requested the Secretariat seeking views from the national focal points on the detailed Term of Reference.

Agenda item 7 Review of the Core Fund

39. The Meeting considered the Secretariat's report on NEASPEC Core Fund and project-based fund. The representative of China expressed continued support and annual contribution of USD 50,000 to the Core Fund and encouraged the Secretariat to explore new channels of financial sources with the possibility of funding projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The representative of ROK confirmed that annual contribution of USD 100,000 for 2018 would be transferred in November 2018 with the possibility of additional contribution in support of the NEACAP subject to the National Assembly approval. He also suggested the Secretariat seeking external financial sources.
40. In responses to the question on the MPA project account expenditure status from the representative of the Russian Federation, the Secretariat explained that the kick-off meeting and related activities were delayed due to the institutional reform in China, internal administrative procedures in changing budget lines and late nominations from member Governments. The representative of Japan expressed constraints on financial contributions to Core Fund and reaffirmed the in-kind contributions through the sharing of know-how and best practices.

G. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the Twenty-Third Senior Officials Meeting

(Agenda item 8)

41. The Meeting discussed the venue, date and agenda of the Twenty-Third Session of the Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Government of Mongolia for generously offering to host the next SOM tentatively planned in September 2019. The proposed dates, venue and the provisional agenda will be announced by the Secretariat in consultation with the host Government in due course.

H. Other matters

(Agenda item 9)

42. The Meeting expressed deep appreciation to the Government of China for generously hosting the Twenty-Second Session of the Senior Officials Meeting and for its warm hospitality and the excellent arrangements for the Meeting, and to the Secretariat for the excellent preparation of the Meeting.

I. Adoption of the report

(Agenda item 10)

43. The Meeting adopted the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Senior Officials Meeting on 25 October 2018. The report of the Meeting was finalized and adopted by circulating it among the member States after the Senior Officials Meeting.

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