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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

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**REVIEW OF ISSUES CONCERNING THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT OF  
NEASPEC**

(Item 8 of the provisional agenda)

*Note by the Secretariat*

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Annex: NEASPEC - Challenges and Opportunities

## **I. BACKGROUND**

1. Further to decisions from the 15<sup>th</sup> Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-15); and the 66<sup>th</sup> and 67<sup>th</sup> ESCAP Commission Sessions, the interim nature of the NEASPEC Secretariat was discontinued and ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEA) has been designated to serve as the permanent secretariat of NEASPEC.

2. As documented in NEASPEC/SOM(16)/7, with increasing support of member States to programme and financial resources, couple with the strengthening of human resources from SRO-ENEA, there has been a considerable expansion of NEASPEC activities in the last two years. Moving forward, NEASPEC/SOM(16)/7 provides some historical background of NEASPEC in a number of institutional arrangement matters as well as identifying several issues for consideration by member States.

3. These matters include (i) further strengthening of human resources including but not limited to secondment of national experts; (ii) scaling up the financial contributions of member States; (iii) addressing the need for the chairmanship during interregnum periods of SOMs as well as rules of procedure; (iv) clarifying the modality of communication between the secretariat; and member States and national focal points; and (v) clarifying the official status of secretariat staff.

4. During SOM-16, it was decided that the Chair of the then SOM to continue his/her functions until this SOM in order to enhance effective communication between member States. The meeting also noted the need to clarify a number of these matters and therefore requested the secretariat to carry out an analytical study of similar subregional programmes and entities with a view of benefitting from their experience as member States wish to deepen and broaden NEASPEC's engagement.

## **II. OUTCOMES OF AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT OF OTHER SUBREGIONAL PROGRAMMES**

5. Based on the decision of SOM-16, the secretariat developed the Terms of Reference and identified Professor Pak Sum Low as a suitable international expert to carry out an analytical study on this subject matter. A copy of the study is attached herewith as Annex 1.

6. The study reviews existing subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms in Asia and the Pacific; in particular, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), as well as the existing subregional environmental frameworks and programmes in North-East Asia (i.e., Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI), North West Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), North-East Asian Forest Forum (NEAFF), East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN), Tripartite Environment

Ministers' Meeting (TEMM), Joint Research Project on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollutants (LTP), and Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET)).

7. Based on this review and drawing from the practices of these mechanisms, frameworks and programmes, the study aims to provide recommendations for strengthening the programmes and institutional arrangement of NEASPEC, including its Secretariat. In particular, the study suggests that, with the permanent status of the NEASPEC Secretariat and its expanding programmes and other activities, including an increase in communications and interactions with the member States and other multilateral agencies and national stakeholders, there is a need to strengthen the Secretariat's human and technical capacity with adequate and predictable financial resources.

8. It should be noted that while a number of recommendations were made by the expert in the study, these are the views of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the secretariat staff. Furthermore, should member States decide to implement any of these recommendations, some might require certain administrative approvals in accordance with established United Nations rules and regulations. Some of the key recommendations are listed below:

- (a) member States to consider strengthening the political commitment to upgrading SOM to the ministerial level and raising the level of delegates from the environment and/or development ministries for the SOM or ministerial level meetings;
- (b) member States to consider strengthening the human and technical capacity of the secretariat through secondment of national experts or through Junior Professional Officers programme;
- (c) member States to consider strengthening the financial mechanisms by moving away from the present voluntary contributions to a more stable and regular mechanism in financing;
- (d) member States to consider according official status to staff members who are serving NEASPEC, including the Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator (if any) and Secretariat assistant, so as to facilitate their communication with member States and external agencies;
- (e) member States to consider maximizing NEASPEC's comparative advantage to catalyse and build partnerships with existing subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms, frameworks and programmes, and expanding the activities of NEASPEC; and
- (f) member States to consider adopting a Five-Year (2013-2017) or Ten-Year (2013-2022) NEASPEC Strategic Action Plan to provide a roadmap for NEASPEC's future activities.

### III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

9. The Meeting may wish to consider recommendations presented by the study, and make decisions on the immediate and mid-term arrangements.
10. The Meeting may wish to provide guidance on the way forward for those recommendations that would require further consultations.

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