NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030

Table of Contents

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[1] 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[2] adopted at SOM-6 in 2000 calls on the 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 the establishment of the ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. In this connection, after a study on the 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 NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025 has further built on the previous plan. In addition, in 2023, NEASPEC commemorated its 30th anniversary, reaffirming the member States' commitment through the "Commemorative Statement on Promoting Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia".[3]

To date, the Strategic Plan has served as a guiding document for developing and implementing NEASPEC work in five thematic priorities: (a) 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.

[1] NEASPEC Framework
[2] Vision Statement for Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia
[3] NEASPEC Commemorative Statement on Promoting Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia

Having built on the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and reflecting new developments during its implementation, the thematic priorities of the Strategic Plan 2026-2030 are (a) Air Pollution, (b) Low Carbon Cities, (c) Desertification and Land Degradation, (d) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation and (e) Marine Protected Areas. While focusing on the five priorities, the Strategic Plan may provide room for identifying other emerging issues of mutual interests among the member States and support dialogue and cooperation on the issues in the context of current five thematic priorities. Potential emerging issues may include the intersections between the five existing thematic priorities, such as climate change, and topics such as energy, disaster risk reduction, agriculture, health, extreme weather, and plastic pollution, among others.

Furthermore, the work of NEASPEC is expected to contribute to the member States' commitment to regional and global goals. In particular, during the SOM-23, the member States agreed to link the strategic plan to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The five thematic priorities 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 thematic priority is also indirectly linked and therefore contribute to other SDGs.

Table 1. NEASPEC thematic priorities and linkages with related SDGs

Air Pollution	
Goal 3.	Good health and well-being: substantially reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water and soil pollution.
Goal11.	Sustainable Cities and Communities: reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management.
Low Carbon City	
Goal 11.	Sustainable Cities and Communities: reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, increase number of cities adopting integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, enhancing urban nature / green spaces through nature based solutions.
Goal 13.	Climate Action: improve human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning, climate literacy of subnational and local governments.
Desertification and Land Degradation	
Goal 13.	Climate Action: improve human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

Goal 15.	Life on land: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Biodiversity and Nature Conservation	
Goal 6.	Clean water and sanitation: protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes; implement integrated water resources management at all levels, including through transboundary cooperation as appropriate.
Goal 15.	Life on land: protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Marine Protected Areas	
Goal 14.	Life below water: conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development, sustainably manage and protect marine and coastal ecosystems to avoid significant adverse impacts.
NEASPEC	
Goal 17.	Partnerships for the Goals: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for Sustainable Development.

2. Subregional Context of NEASPEC Work

2.1. Air Pollution

North-East Asia has made remarkable progress in reducing key air pollutants such as PM2.5 and NO2 through comprehensive policies targeting emissions from industrial, transportation, and residential sectors.[4]

[4] The degree of improvement has varied across countries with China and Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar) experiencing the most significant reductions over the last decade as PM2.5 levels fell by over 60%. In Japan and the Republic of Korea, PM2.5 concentrations decreased by approximately 45% and 30% respectively, as both countries strengthened compliance with national air quality standards. Over the same period, emissions of key precursors of PM2.5 and ozone were reduced. The largest reductions were achieved for SO2, NOx, and primary PM2.5 driven by the implementation of policies and measures aimed at controlling emissions from power plants, large industrial facilities, road transport, and household cooking and heating.

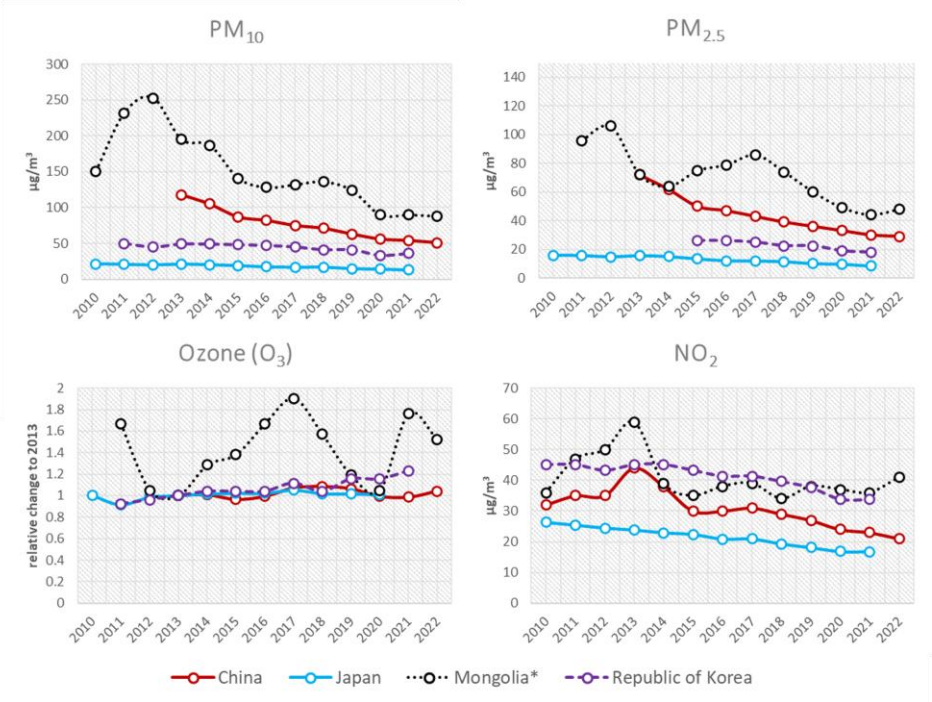

Figure 1. Annual average concentrations and trends of key air pollutants (PM_{10}, $PM_{2.5}$, ozone, and NO_2) for the period 2010-2022 in China, Japan, Mongolia, and Republic of Korea. Source: ***NEACAP Policy Analysis Report 2025: Successes and Challenges in Addressing Air Pollution in North-East Asia: A Call to Strengthen Regional Collaboration.***

Nearly all the countries in North-East Asia have set ambient air quality standards, aiming to progressively align them with WHO guidelines.[5] These countries have also implemented source-oriented emission regulations that have been progressively updated, considering economic conditions. These regulations address both stationary and mobile sources, targeting emissions of SO2, NOx, and PM, and are supported by robust legal enforcement frameworks. Major urban and political centres, including capital cities, have often led the way by implementing ambitious policies that have significantly reduced pollution, paving the way for similar national-level initiatives.

Despite the decline in PM2.5 levels, ozone concentrations remain high, particularly in urban areas. This leads to significant health impacts and economic burdens, including reduced agricultural yields. Rising ozone levels are primarily driven by changes in atmospheric composition. Policies aimed at reducing ozone precursors (i.e., NOx, VOCs) should be strengthened to reduce the emissions of Non-Methane Volatile Organic Compounds (NMVOCs) and other key precursors. Additionally, changing meteorological and climate

[5] https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/345329/9789240034228-eng.pdf?sequence=1

conditions (e.g. frequent higher temperatures) have significantly contributed to ozone pollution.

A considerable proportion of urban residents continue to experience pollution levels that exceed national air quality standards and remain far above the WHO guidelines for PM2.5 and ozone. A substantial share of urban pollution originates from outside city boundaries, highlighting the need for collaboration with neighboring provinces or prefectures and engagement with diverse stakeholders to address domestic pollution sources. In addition, cooperation and technical support for better air quality monitoring is needed, leveraging from the good practices and technical expertise from the member States in the subregion.

Climate change exacerbates air pollution-related challenges, with increasing frequency and intensity of heatwaves and wildfires enabling the conditions for prolonged high pollution episodes that deteriorate air quality. Addressing these emerging challenges requires enhanced understanding and policy coherence. As it is, the efficient implementation of current policies and development of further actions are still hampered by several barriers (i.e., socio-economic, technological, institutional).

In response to strengthening national actions and growing opportunities for cooperation to amplify benefits and address shared challenges, the member States of NEASPEC established the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) in 2018 to ensure the protection of the environment and human health from air pollution in North-East Asia. Since its launch, the member States have taken steady steps to institutionalize the partnership, including forming the Science and Policy Committee (SPC), designating Technical Centers (TC), and adopting a five-year workplan (2021-2025) to fully operationalize NEACAP.

In recent years, developments in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond have reaffirmed the relevance of the NEACAP. NEACAP was one of the key catalysts leading to the adoption of the ESCAP resolution 75/4[6] in 2019, which advocates for strengthened regional cooperation to tackle air pollution challenges in Asia and the Pacific. The resolution laid the groundwork for the member States in the region to adopt the Asia Pacific Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution (RAPAP) in 2022, and NEACAP is featured in the recently launched online RAPAP Partnership and Coordination Platform[7]. The platform provides an avenue for cooperation to enhance scientific understanding of air pollution sources, processes, trends, and health impacts. In 2024, the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA/EA.6/Res.10)[8] culminated in a resolution to develop a global knowledge sharing platform and foster regional cooperation among the member States to combat air pollution. There are multiple on-going initiatives for air pollution control and therefore NEACAP could strengthen synergies with

[6] https://docs.un.org/en/ESCAP/RES/75/4
[7] North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership
[8] https://docs.un.org/en/UNEP/EA.6/Res.10

existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms on air pollution including Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

The threats and impacts of air pollution are dynamic and ever evolving, including in the context of climate action. The connections between air pollution and climate change create synergies engendering change to maximize the positive impacts of mitigation efforts. To this end, NEACAP is envisaged to leverage from the tangible progress of strengthened knowledge sharing collaborations and carry forward joint actions to further operationalize the partnership.

2.2. Low Carbon Cities

Cities in East and North-East Asia exemplify rapid and transformative urbanization, driven by economic dynamism and technological advancements. This subregion hosts some of the world's largest urban agglomerations—Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai, and Beijing—serving as global hubs for innovation and finance. However, these cities also grapple with significant challenges, including high carbon emissions, worsening air pollution, and rising energy demands.
To address these pressures, low-carbon urban strategies are gaining prominence, integrating green infrastructure, energy-efficient buildings, and electrified public transit. Meanwhile, intermediary cities in the subregion are increasingly pivotal in supporting balanced development and alleviating pressures on megacities. Many are pioneering compact, transit-oriented, and nature-positive urban designs to enhance resilience and sustainability. These efforts are crucial for reducing the region's urban carbon emission and aligning with global climate targets such as the Paris Agreement.

Various initiatives for reducing greenhouse gas (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.

NEASPEC member States are demonstrating commitment to urban climate action through localization of long-term low GHG emission development strategies (LT-LEDS) and the upcoming third generation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. Given the concentration of emissions, infrastructure and population in urban areas, integrating urban development into NDCs and their implementation is a priority. Strengthening NDCs through sustainable urban development, such as energy efficiency, low carbon mobility and transportation, resource management, buildings, and green space expansion through nature-based solutions, integrates urbanization into the climate agenda while addressing local priorities.

In particular, the process of formulating and communicating "long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies (LEDS)"[9] according to the Paris Agreement (Article 4.19) is expected to further strengthen the existing targets under the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) (Table 2).

Table 2. NEASPEC Member Countries: Nationally Determined Contribution on GHG emissions

China	Striving to achieve Carbon Neutrality before 2060 and Carbon Peaking before 2030.
DPRK	Reduce 35,800,000 tons of GHG per year by 2030 by raising the rate of total emission to 16.4% on its own compared to the planned 8% of the NDC submitted in 2016.
Japan	Net Zero by 2050; GHG emissions by 60 percent in fiscal year (FY) 2035 and by 73 percent in FY 2040, respectively, from its FY 2013.
Mongolia	Approximately 22.7% reduction (16.9 $MtCO_2$-eq.) by 2030, compared to a business-as-usual (BAU) scenario, excluding LULUCF.
Republic of Korea	Carbon Neutrality by 2050; 40% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030, compared to the levels in 2018.
Russian Federation	Reduction of GHG to 70-75% by 2030 from 1990 levels.

Source: UNFCCC NDC Interim Registry
https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/NDCStaging/Pages/All.aspx (accessed on 1 April 2025).

NEASPEC member States recognize the role of cities as both major emission sources and innovation hubs for sustainability. In this context, NEASPEC has prioritized information sharing and municipal capacity-building for climate action. Efforts focused on low-carbon city policies in NEASPEC member States are exemplified in Table 3.

Table 3. Low Carbon City Policies and Actions in North-East Asia

China	"**First Batch of Carbon Peak Pilot List"** released in 2023, designating 25 cities and 10 industrial parks as carbon peaking pilots. Each selected city and park are required to develop an implementation plan to achieve carbon peaking goals by 2030.
DPRK	Central planning focuses on reforestation, energy efficiency, and renewable energy. No publicized city-level pilot; local measures are mandated centrally, especially in Pyongyang (e.g., electric public transport, efficiency in construction).
Japan	As of 27 December 2024, 1,127 local governments including Tokyo, Kyoto, and Yokohama announced their commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050.[10]

[9] 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.

[10] 2050 Zero Carbon Cities in Japan | Global Environment | Ministry of the Environment, Government of Japan

	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.
Mongolia	Low-carbon city action integrated into national energy, transport, and waste policies. Ulaanbaatar leads a **Green Development Action Plan**, supported by international partnerships (e.g., GCF) for pilot projects (energy-efficient buildings, etc.).
Republic of Korea	**Framework Act on Low Carbon Green Growth:** Pilot programs to promote low carbon cities, including the Climate Change Adaptation Model City Project; the Green City Project. **Local Government Alliance for Carbon Neutrality:** Launched in 2020 a voluntary network involving 80 municipal governments for carbon neutral by 2050. Establish a model of city-level carbon neutrality by selecting two places (Suwon and Chungju) as a **carbon-neutral green city** for 2022-2026.
Russian Federation	Law № 34 (2022) introduced a pilot experiment to limit greenhouse gas emissions in a specific region, with Sakhalin selected as the pilot area. The initiative includes a carbon trading scheme for Sakhalin.

Stakeholders' discussions at the annual International Forum on Low Carbon Cities held annually since 2021 have revealed disparities in municipal capacity for low-carbon development, compounded by competing policy priorities and resource constraints. These findings underscore the need for policies that integrate climate action with strategic urban plans as well as municipalities' core mandate of delivering urban basic services, which support economic growth. Enabling urban climate finance is central to achieving these objectives, as municipalities often lack the financial resources necessary for large-scale climate action.[11]

NEASPEC's North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) aims to enhance its role in connecting local governments with expertise and best practices. Through NEA-LCCP, NEASPEC has supported city-level cooperation promoting peer learning and policy innovation. The platform highlights the co-benefits of urban climate action—including public health, and economic resilience—while identifying capacity and resource gaps. Strengthening collaboration between national and municipal levels will be critical for advancing climate-resilient urban development in North-East Asia. NEA-LCCP aligns with international networks such as ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), and the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA), Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (CCFLA). NEA-LCCP also aligns with key regional regular engagements such as the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum

[11] ESCAP's collaboration with the Cities Climate Finance Gap Fund has facilitated the application of urban climate finance readiness assessments through the Urban-Act project. These assessments help cities identify financial gaps, improve project bankability, and unlock investment opportunities, thereby strengthening the overall capacity of local governments to implement ambitious climate initiatives.

(APUF), which convenes stakeholders across sectors and drives forward commitments for climate-resilient cities.

2.3. Desertification and Land Degradation

The NEASPEC work on desertification and land degradation (DLD) aims to address underlying causes, key drivers and wide-ranging impacts of DLD, including in the context of its interlinkages with climate change.[12] While forestry management plays a crucial role in combating desertification, socio-economic factors and climatic conditions are equally vital in both exacerbating and mitigating DLD. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the capacity to address anthropogenic drivers and factors, such as animal husbandry, water withdrawals and mining activities, which significantly influence DLD trends.

Interlinkages with climate change should also be addressed. While climate change influences land use patterns and drives DLD through changes in precipitation, soil moisture, temperature and wind speed, land itself plays a pivotal role in the global carbon cycle. The world's soils store more carbon than the planet's biomass and atmosphere combined, making sustainable land management an urgent priority. The Global Land Outlook(Second Edition) [13] highlights the critical interconnections between climate change, biodiversity loss, land use change, and geochemical cycles – all of which are directly linked to human-induced DLD and drought, calling for urgent action to avoid widespread, abrupt, or irreversible environmental changes. In this context, a synergistic approach to land management offers co-benefits for both climate change adaptation and mitigation, while addressing DLD. Sustainable land management can prevent and reverse DLD, sustain land productivity, and bolster climate resilience.

Desertification not only exacerbates climate change through changes in vegetation cover, dust aerosols and GHG fluxes, but climate change, in turn, intensifies DLD. These reinforcing feedback loops highlight the urgency of integrated, cross-sectoral responses to DLD, which require regional cooperation, policy alignment, and innovative land management solutions to ensure resilient and sustainable landscapes for future generations.

In this context, NEASPEC could work on strengthening collaboration by facilitating dialogue among key stakeholders and improving understanding of the underlying causes, key drivers and wide-ranging impacts of DLD, including in the context of its interlinkages with climate change, by conducting policy and analytical studies. This would further align with the global mandate including the United Nations Environment Assembly Resolution 6/14 on

[12]The 26th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-26) of NEASPEC approved the NEASPEC Approach for Desertification and Land Degradation. This focuses on enhancing the understanding of the causes, drivers and impacts of DLD in North-East Asia, including the interlinkages between climate change and DLD, and on building the capacity to assess, monitor and manage them through promoting international cooperation.

[13] unccd.int/sites/default/files/2022-04/UNCCD_GLO2_low-res_2.pdf

strengthening international efforts to combat desertification and land degradation, restore degraded land, and promote sustainable land management.[14] Additionally, fostering synergies with international, regional and national organizations specializing in forestry and sustainable land management should be a priority.

2.4. 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[15], benefiting both biodiversity and nature's contributions to people. 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.[16] The IUCN Red List[17] (Table 4) indicates the substantial 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 4. IUCN Red List: Threatened Species in NEASPEC Member Countries *(TBC)*

Country	Mammals	Birds	Reptiles*	Amphibians	Fishes*	Molluscs*	Other Inverts*	Plants*	Fungi & Protists*	Total*
CHN	88	102	78	175	395	29	100	840	8	1,815
DPRK	17	57	5	1	20	9	6	22	2	139
JPN	31	70	43	53	170	72	183	76	15	713
MNG	11	33	0	0	2	1	1	2	4	54
ROK	13	47	3	9	87	6	20	38	3	226
RUS	38	69	9	0	68	10	39	72	47	352

(Last updated: 13 March 2025)
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 the member States improve domestic measures for biodiversity conservation, subregional or multilateral cooperation could focus on ecological connectivity and transboundary cooperation that strengthen ecological corridors, restore habitats, and mitigate the impact of climate change on biodiversity. In this regard, protected areas and habitats in transboundary areas can serve as the key focus of enhanced collaboration between NEASPEC member States on connectivity conservation. Beyond protected areas, NEASPEC could also

[14] Httos://docs.un.org/en/UNEP/EA.6/Res.14
[15] North-East Asia in the IPBES assessment does not include the Russian Federation, but all other five countries.
[16] IPBES, 2018. Regional Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services for Asia and the Pacific
[17] IUCN, 2025. Threatened species in each country
https://www.iucnredlist.org/resources/summary-statistics#Summary%20Tables

support efforts related to Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). OECMs, such as agricultural landscapes and local communities' territories as well as lands owned by diverse sectors including private companies, can play a key role in achieving conservation targets while maintaining socio-economic benefits and contributing to ensuring engagement of wider stakeholders including business sectors. In this context, integrating biodiversity considerations into, for example, infrastructure development, land-use planning, and water management as well as other public and private policies is becoming crucial to ensuring ecosystem resilience, with an emphasis on nature-based solutions that leverage ecosystem services for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

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 were identified by the Nature Conservation Strategy in 2007.[18] 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. In light of emerging conservation needs in the subregion, NEASPEC may also consider exploring additional species or redefining key species under threat, particularly in relation to the nexus of migratory species and marine biodiversity in the subregion for expanded and concerted conservation measures. In this context, NEASPEC may consider expanding its flagship species to include additional migratory species and marine mammals that inhabit transboundary areas in North-East Asia, subject to further consultation and approval by SOM.

Furthermore, NEASPEC connects its work with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), adopted in 2022, which sets 23 global biodiversity targets for 2030 and four goals for 2050, aiming to reach the vision of a world living in harmony with nature by 2050[19]. The Framework aims for 30x30 protection of land and sea areas, halting species extinction, and ensuring sustainable management of natural resources. CBD COP16 in 2024 and 2025 reaffirmed its commitments to strengthen financial mechanisms, integrate biodiversity into climate and development planning, and increase the recognition of OECMs as crucial conservation measures.[20]

NEASPEC could support its member States to ensure that national-level efforts are effectively aligned with regional priorities and global frameworks, including the GBF. In parallel, NEASPEC could enhance transboundary cooperation and regional coordination to facilitate collective progress toward the GBF's ambitious global targets.

[18] http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/Publication_SavingNatureConservation_2.pdf
[19] Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework
[20] Summary report 25–27 February 2025

2.5. Marine Protected Areas

The North-East Asian region holds ecological significance and strategic importance for global biodiversity conservation. The intertidal flats of the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea remain critical, serving as essential nursery grounds for marine species and as vital habitats for migratory birds. These ecosystems provide indispensable ecosystem services and support the well-being of local communities. Many wetlands in the region are internationally recognized under the Ramsar Convention, highlighting their ecological value and the need for sustainable management.

Despite conservation efforts, challenges persist in managing human impacts and ensuring that conservation objectives are effectively balanced with sustainable use. The linkage between biodiversity conservation and socio-economic benefits remains critical for securing long-term ecosystem health and resilience. Socio-economic considerations such as community engagement and sustainable livelihoods are increasingly recognized as central to the success of marine protected area (MPA) management. In this regard, MPAs play a catalytic role in conserving representative samples of marine biodiversity and associated ecosystems for the long-term viability of the marine environment. MPAs also guide human activities to protect ecologically critical sites, serve as focal points for education and research, and provide grounds for sustainable uses such as nature-based tourism and other economic activities.

North-East Asian countries have established many MPAs under various administrative and legislative frameworks. However, significant variations exist in terms of characteristics, institutional settings, and regulations among countries. Strengthening cooperation and knowledge exchange on effective MPA management remains essential for enhancing the ecological effectiveness and socio-economic benefits of these protected areas. While these differences exist, some progress in conserving the marine environment has been made in the subregion. For example, China and the Republic of Korea inscribed several sites along the Yellow Sea coast through the UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHS), recognizing the area's critical importance for biodiversity.[21]

At a global level, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted in December 2022, setting forth 23 global targets to halt and reserve biodiversity loss by 2030. Central to these is Target 3, commonly referred to as the "30x30" target, which aims to ensure that by 2030, at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas are effectively conserved and managed through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). Other global trends include the United Nations Decade of

[21] In China, the "Migratory Bird Sanctuaries along the Coast of Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf of China" were first inscribed as a WHS in 2019 (Phase I). In 2024, China successfully extended this WHS (Phase II) to include five additional sites. In the Republic of Korea, the "Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats" was inscribed as a WHS in 2021. These sites are characterized by diverse tidal flat habitats that support a wide range of species.

Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021–2030), aiming to reverse the decline in ocean health and create opportunities for sustainable development. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, adopted in June 2023 under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), also marks a major step toward conserving marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction, highlighting the importance of transboundary cooperation and the creation of MPAs in international waters.

The growing recognition of Ocean-Based Climate Action (OBCA) reflects the increasing understanding that oceans play a crucial role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Coastal and marine ecosystems, such as mangroves, seagrass meadows, and salt marshes, act as carbon sinks and natural defenses against extreme weather. Promoting nature-based solutions (NbS) within MPAs can strengthen climate resilience while supporting biodiversity and sustaining local livelihoods. ESCAP has actively promoted OBCA as a key strategy for aligning marine conservation with national climate goals at both national and regional levels.[22] This includes supporting the member States in protecting and enhancing blue carbon ecosystems, facilitating carbon stock assessment and investment in blue carbon credits, advancing policy recommendations on integrating OBCA into NDCs under the Paris Agreement and facilitating regional dialogue and knowledge-sharing on OBCA best practices and financing.

In this regard, NEASPEC could play a pivotal role in facilitating regional cooperation and knowledge exchange on MPA management, by fostering cross-border dialogue, supporting joint research, and linking national efforts with global conservation goals. Expanding the role of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) as a regional platform for knowledge-sharing and capacity-building will further enhance the region's ability to meet the 30x30 target and promote long-term marine biodiversity conservation. Strengthening partnerships among international organizations, MPA managers, scientific institutions, policymakers, and local communities is essential for building capacity and improving management effectiveness. Collaborative initiatives such as transboundary monitoring of migratory species, joint marine spatial planning (MSP), and capacity-building projects would be key to enhancing connectivity and resilience across MPAs in the subregion.

3. Strategic Goals and Approaches

3.1. Goals

(a) Contribute to the implementation of national, regional and global goals for sustainable development, in particular, environment-related Sustainable Development Goals.

[22] OBCA Initiative.pdf

(b) Enhance science-based, policy-oriented cooperation to address subregional environmental challenges.
(c) Mobilize mutual support to manage domestic environmental issues of the member States.
(d) Strengthen NEASPEC partnerships within subregional, regional and global networks in the five thematic priorities.
(e) Promote inclusive and participatory approaches, including capacity building and knowledge exchange, to enhance effective implementation of NEASPEC's thematic priorities.

3.2. Approaches

(a) Focus on joint actions across thematic priorities to maximize the efficiency and impact of subregional cooperation.
(b) Identify and develop new partnerships with subregional, regional and global actors to strengthen NEASPEC role.
(c) Develop and implement joint actions promoting science-policy linkages in each thematic priority.
(d) Integrate digitalization, strategic foresight, and data-driven approaches into NEASPEC activities.
(e) Support knowledge sharing and capacity development among member governments, local communities, women and youth, and other stakeholders.
(f) Operate effective platforms and networks for member governments and other major stakeholders to enhance subregional environmental cooperation and coordinated actions.
(g) Identify and enhance potential linkages between NEASPEC and subregional programmes and regional and global goals.

3.3. Flexibility and Periodical Review

(a) To improve NEASPEC's effectiveness, the existing five thematic priorities will adopt a flexible and adaptive structure, including through:
    - combining overlapping areas,
    - phasing out less relevant programmes,
    - introducing new priority areas.
(b) To implement this flexible approach, a structured review process may be established, subject to member States' consideration, to assess the effectiveness and relevance of thematic priorities.
(c) A logical framework or programme of work may be developed to guide the implementation of thematic priorities, aligning activities with objectives, outputs, and

outcomes, and reflecting member States' priorities. An indicative logical framework is included in the annex.

4. Objectives and Outputs

4.1. Air Pollution

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030, the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership, supported by the Science and Policy Committee and designated Technical Centers, is developed as a fully functioning platform facilitating strategic and effective cooperation in addressing air pollution challenges in North-East Asia.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Strengthened information exchange through cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation to support member countries improve air quality.
  b) Increased technical collaboration and capacity building assistance through designated Technical Centers.
  c) Strengthened collective and transformative actions through joint research focusing on coordinating strategy for improving air quality management and its synergies with climate strategies.
  d) Strengthened synergies with existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms (multilateral, regional, global) on air pollution through joint projects.

4.2. Low Carbon Cities

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030, the NEA-LCCP is developed to a fully functional platform to support communications and cooperation among stakeholders and promote awareness and capacity for developing and implementing low carbon city plans.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Enhanced exchange of knowledge and best practices on low carbon urban development and its co-benefits with climate mitigation and resilience.
  b) Enhanced technical cooperation for strengthening capacity to effectively implement low carbon city approach.

c) Strengthened capacity of LCCP to provide technical and practical support to address specific conditions and capacities for LCC development through linking, mobilizing and connecting expert networks.
d) Increased knowledge resources on urban climate action.

4.3. Desertification and Land Degradation

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030, regional mechanisms for collaboration among NEASPEC member States on DLD are strengthened with enhanced capacity for assessing, monitoring and managing DLD.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Strengthened collaboration in addressing DLD by facilitating dialogue among NEASPEC Member States and other stakeholders, creating synergies with regional cooperation mechanisms such as DLDD-NEAN, and organizing subregional forums, seminars and workshops for relevant policymakers, experts and local communities.
  b) Improved scientific and policy understanding of DLD drivers, impacts, and their links to climate change and biodiversity loss, through collaborative research and policy-oriented studies.
  c) Increased visibility and raised awareness about NEASPEC in main international fora.
  d) A database of good practices built for future sharing including through global publications.

4.4. Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030, subregional cooperation among NEASPEC member States on biodiversity conservation is strengthened by enhancing the conservation of flagship species and their habitats, promoting ecological connectivity and supporting the implementation of global and national biodiversity strategies.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Strengthened cross-border ecological connectivity, and landscape-level conservation through bilateral, multilateral, and multistakeholder cooperation.
  b) Facilitated capacity building and knowledge sharing through collaborative research and monitoring, and the establishment and the development of a knowledge-sharing platform.

c) Strengthened monitoring and protection of flagship species and their habitats.
d) Maximized synergies with local, national, (sub-)regional, and global initiatives for capacity-building, technical assistance, and policy alignment through the leverage of existing partnerships and exploration of new opportunities.

4.5. Marine Protected Areas

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030, NEAMPAN's role is recognized as a key platform for enhancing partnerships among MPAs and stakeholders.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Enhanced capacity to achieve the 30x30 target and other relevant goals under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 in a coordinated and nature-based manner.
  b) Strengthened MPA management effectiveness through the facilitation of the exchange of knowledge, information, experiences, and best practices and the promotion of nature-based solutions.
  c) Strengthened cross-border cooperation on the protection of endangered and rare migratory marine species, recognizing their interconnected nature of ecosystem across MPAs.
  d) Enhanced biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and socio-economic benefits through the integration of nature-based solutions and marine spatial planning into MPA management.
  e) Maximized synergies with national, (sub-)regional, and global initiatives for capacity-building, technical assistance, and policy alignment through the leverage of existing partnerships and exploration of new opportunities.

4.6. Interlinkages and other emerging issues

- **Objective:**
  - By 2030 NEASPEC's thematic priorities are strongly interlinked, and synergies are optimized.

- **Outputs:**
  a) Strengthened mutual understanding and policy dialogue among the member States, and in consultation with other relevant stakeholders, on emerging issues and plan of joint action developed accordingly.
  b) Enhanced capacities of the member States to identify interlinkages and issues to support policy dialogue and joint action.

c) Intensified linkages with regional initiatives, including those facilitated by ESCAP in collaboration with ESCAP's relevant divisions,
d) Defined linkages with global commitments (SDGs, MEAs) translated into national/regional policies.
e) Increased visibility and contributions of subregional perspectives at global platforms and high-level engagements.
f) Strengthened partnerships with international organizations (IOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector (e.g., ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN)).

5. Institutional Arrangement

5.1. Overall Direction

a) Increase ownership of the member States by encouraging participation of national institutions and other stakeholders in programme development and implementation.
b) Strengthen NEASPEC governance to optimize synergies with other ESCAP programmes.
c) Strengthen linkages and coordination with other relevant initiatives of the member States for enhanced effectiveness.
d) Enhance institutional, technical and financial contributions of the member States to NEASPEC.
e) Promote gender-inclusive policies and processes.

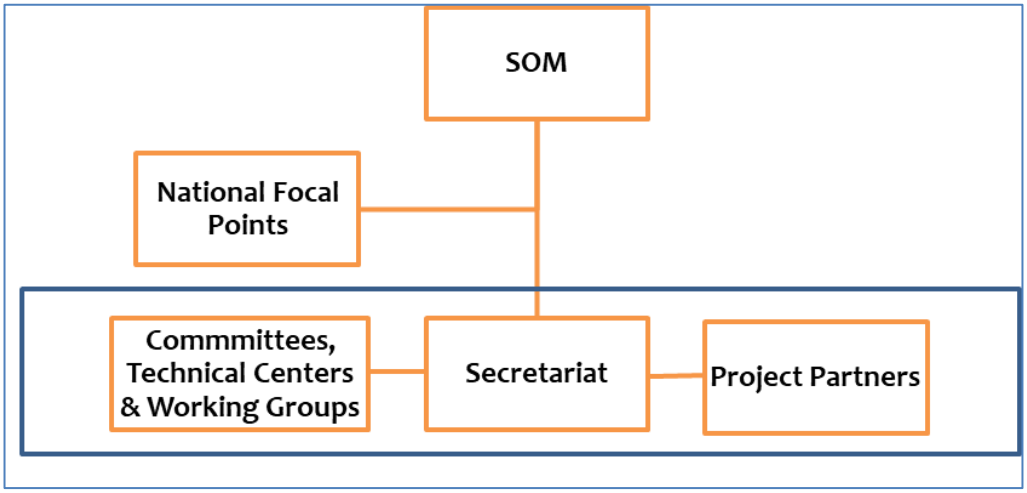

Figure 2. NEASPEC's Institutional Arrangements

5.2. Senior Officials Meeting (SOM)

a) Further improve the effectiveness of its primary function as the governing body of NEASPEC with the proper level of representations from the member States.
b) Promote SOM as a key subregional platform for joint review and dialogue among major stakeholders on subregional environmental cooperation.
c) Improve clarification on NEASPEC's operations and governance structure, ensuring transparent decision-making and implementation of mandates.
d) Establish clear rotational roles and schedules for the hosting of SOM and rules governing its organization.

5.3. National Focal Points

a) Strengthen the role of national focal points by clarifying their terms of references and roles.
b) Structuring the national focal points meeting by defining specific meeting dates.

5.4. Secretariat

a) Improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Secretariat in programme management and communication with the member governments and stakeholders, ensuring these roles are clearly refined in written notes or guidelines.
b) Strengthen and supplement the Secretariat's capacity including by enhancing the role of committees, working groups and national institutions in programme development and implementation.

5.5. Committees and Working Groups

a) Support the effective operation of the existing committees (i.e., NEACAP Science and Policy Committee and NEAMPAN Steering Committee) as the main instrument for planning and implementing work in the respective thematic priority in accordance with the agreed mandates.
b) Develop committees and/or working groups in other thematic areas, as necessary.
c) Delegate proper authority and provide support to the national members of committees and working groups for a fully functional institutional arrangement.
d) Formalize the involvement of ESCAP's relevant divisions working on the thematic priorities, including the Environment and Development Division (EDD) and Infrastructure and Disaster Risk Reduction Division (IDD).

5.6. Financial Resources

a) Improve financial resources of NEASPEC by ensuring more stable and predictable national contributions to the Core Fund.
b) Mobilize financial resources and in-kind contributions from different government units and institutions of the member States, as appropriate, and from other sources (e.g., private sector, multilateral development banks).
c) Build partnership with national and international institutions as well as civil society organizations to diversify the modality of financial and in-kind contributions.
d) Encourage participation of stakeholder groups and self-financing of beneficiaries to participate in the programme.
e) Seek project-based funding to complement the Core Fund by enabling more targeted and results-oriented activities.

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 the member States in programme planning and implementation.

Evaluation will include the assessment of project outcomes and recommendations, which will also be reported to the SOM. Activities and project can be revised according to the feedback from major stakeholders and to be decided by relevant Committee and/or the SOM.

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

7. Visibility and Outreach

NEASPEC will plan to strengthen the visibility and outreach of its work to enhance stakeholder engagement and promote awareness of its role in regional and global environmental cooperation. This will be achieved by utilizing existing communication

channels and strategic partnerships by regularly updating its website and social media platforms to share key achievements, events and research. Targeted communication materials, such as fact sheets, infographics, and newsletters, could be developed to highlight NEASPEC's work. Outreach efforts may also include organizing webinars or educational content to raise public awareness. Through these efforts, NEASPEC seeks to increase its visibility, strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, and broaden public support for its thematic priorities.

…….

Annex 1. Indicative Logical Framework

Goals	Contribute to the implementation of national, regional and global goals for sustainable development, in particular, environment-related Sustainable Development Goals		Enhance science-based, policy-oriented cooperation to address subregional environmental challenges		Mobilize mutual support to manage domestic environmental issues of the member States	Strengthen NEASPEC partnerships within subregional, regional and global networks in the five thematic priorities
Objectives: By 2030	The North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership, supported by the Science and Policy Committee and designated Technical Centers, is developed as a fully-functioning platform facilitating strategic and effective cooperation in addressing air pollution challenges in North-East Asia.	The NEA-LCCP is developed to a fully functional platform to support communications and cooperation among stakeholders and promote awareness and capacity for developing and implementing low carbon city plans.	Regional mechanisms for collaboration among NEASPEC member States on DLD are strengthened with enhanced capacity for assessing, monitoring and managing DLD.	Subregional cooperation on biodiversity conservation is strengthened by enhancing the conservation of flagship species and their habitats, promoting ecological connectivity and supporting the implementation of global and national biodiversity strategies.	NEAMPAN's role is recognized as a key platform for enhancing partnerships among MPAs and stakeholders.	NEASPEC's thematic priorities are strongly interlinked and synergies ar appropriately optimized.
Outputs	• Strengthened information exchange through cross-sectoral collaboration and cooperation to address key pollution sources	• Strengthened sharing of information and experience in policies and measures on low carbon city policies and its climate change synergies	• Strengthened collaboration in addressing DLD by facilitating dialogue among key stakeholders and organizing subregional forums, seminars and workshops	• Strengthened synergies on cross-border and connectivity conservation through bilateral, multilateral and multistakeholder cooperation	• Improved capacity to achieve the 30x30 target and other relevant goals under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 14 in a coordinated and nature-based manner	• Strengthened mutual understanding and dialogue among the member States, and in consultation with other relevant stakeholders, on emerging issues and plan of joint action developed accordingly
	• Increased technical collaboration and capacity building through designated Technical Centers	• Enhanced mutual technical assistance for strengthening capacity to effectively implement low carbon city approach		• Facilitated capacity building and knowledge sharing through joint research and monitoring, and the establishment of a knowledge-sharing platform	• Strengthened MPA management effectiveness through the facilitation of the exchange of knowledge, information, experiences, and best practices and the promotion of nature-based solutions	• Enhanced capacities of the member States to identify interlinkages and issues to support policy dialogue and joint action

	• Strengthened collective and transformative climate actions through research focusing on connections and integrated policies addressing air quality and climate change	• Strengthened capacity of LCCP to provide technical and practical support to address specific conditions and capacities for LCC development through linking, mobilizing and connecting expert networks	• Improved understanding of the underlying drivers, key factors, and broad impacts of DLD, including in the context of its interlinkage with climate change, through conducting policy/analytical studies	• Strengthened monitoring and protection of flagship species and their habitats	• Strengthened cooperation on the protection of endangered and rare migratory marine species, recognizing their interconnected nature of ecosystem across MPAs	• Intensified linkages with regional initiatives, including those facilitated by ESCAP in collaboration with ESCAP's relevant divisions
	• Strengthened synergies with existing collaborative programmes and mechanisms (multilateral, regional, global) on air pollution through joint projects	• Increased knowledge resources on urban climate action		• Maximized synergies with national, (sub-)regional, and global initiatives for capacity-building, technical assistance, and policy alignment through the leverage of existing partnerships and exploration of new opportunities	• Enhanced biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and socio-economic benefits through the integration of nature-based solutions and marine spatial planning into MPA management	• Defined linkages with global commitments (SDGs, MEAs) translated into national/regional policies
					• Maximized synergies with national, (sub-)regional, and global initiatives for capacity-building, technical assistance, and policy alignment through the leverage of existing partnerships and exploration of new opportunities	• Increased visibility and contributions of subregional perspectives at global platforms and high-level engagements
						• Strengthened partnerships with international organizations (IOs), civil society organizations (CSOs), and the private sector (e.g., ESCAP Sustainable Business Network (ESBN))