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Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda)

Marine Protected Areas

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are recognized as vital instruments in conserving marine biodiversity and supporting the resilience of marine and coastal ecosystems. MPAs help mitigate the impacts of climate change, reduce anthropogenic pressures, and preserve critical habitats. In response to growing global and regional imperatives, initiatives such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), Sustainable Development Goal 14, and ESCAP's Ocean-Based Climate Action (OBICA) emphasize the strategic importance of MPAs in achieving biodiversity and climate objectives.

2. In line with this global and regional context, the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN), launched at the 18th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-18) in 2013, continues to serve as the only dedicated MPA network in North-East Asia. Its core objective is to develop an effective, functional, and representative network of marine protected areas across the subregion. NEAMPAN fulfils this mandate by providing a platform for knowledge sharing, joint studies, and forging partnerships with global and regional MPA networks.

3. In 2024, NEMAPAN carried out a range of activities designed to strengthen the science-policy interface, build capacities, and enhance cooperation at regional and global levels. These efforts have helped to deepen alignment with international targets and to reinforce NEAMPAN's position as a conduit between national MPA efforts and broader global and regional frameworks. The network's activities, ranging from climate vulnerability assessments and expert workshops to participation in regional and global fora, demonstrate its growing relevance in facilitating regional contributions to the 30x30 target, the GBF, and other biodiversity and climate agendas.

II. PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON MARINE PROTECTED AREAS

Knowledge Production: Research and Policy Advice

4. NEAMPAN conducted climate vulnerability studies targeting marine protected areas in China and the Republic of Korea, aiming to strengthen the science-policy interface and build a foundation for climate-responsive MPA management. These studies involved analyses of global trends, reviews of national and site-level policies, and site-level assessments. Conducted in close collaboration with national consultants, each country produced an individual technical report reflecting its specific circumstances and priorities. These reports will be made publicly available and include recommendations to inform future NEAMPAN priorities and guide site-specific climate adaptation practices (Annex I and Annex II).

5. As reported at SOM-25, the secretariat introduced the concept of a subregional study on climate change and marine protected areas in North-East Asia. With the completion of the China and Republic of Korea studies, the secretariat plans to conduct similar studies for Japan and the Russian Federation by identifying suitable national experts through the NEAMPAN Steering Committee members. These follow-up studies aim to complete the subregional perspective and further support the integration of MPAs into national and regional climate action plans, while reinforcing NEAMPAN's contribution to the GBF and ESCAP's OBCA initiative.

Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

6. The secretariat co-organized the **Workshop on “Advancing Marine Protected Areas for Climate Action, Biodiversity, and Sustainable Development”** and **MPA talk** on 11-12 November 2024 in Qingdao, China. Hosted in collaboration with the First Institute of Oceanography (FIO) and the China-PEMSEA Sustainable Coastal Management Cooperation Center, this marked the first NEAMPAN event held outside the Republic of Korea. The workshop convened approximately 70 participants, including NEAMPAN Steering Committee members, site managers, researchers, NGOs, and civil society representatives, and highlighted the critical role of MPAs in addressing climate change challenges, aligning efforts with global and regional frameworks. Participants exchanged insights on MPA management practices, biodiversity conservation and strategies to enhance the resilience of MPAs through collaborative initiatives. The workshop also underscored NEAMPAN's significant role as a regional platform for fostering partnerships and promoting the sustainable conservation of marine ecosystems.

7. Following the workshop, the MPA Talk was convened on the morning of 12 November 2024 as a follow-up to the earlier virtual session held on 28 March 2024 with the NEAMPAN Steering Committee. The session reviewed NEAMPAN's activities over the past four years (2021-2024), identified implementation gaps, and initiated discussions on the network's strategy for 2025 and the forthcoming NEASPEC strategic plan (2026-2030). Key proposals included strengthening MPA effectiveness evaluations, enhancing transboundary cooperation on marine mammal conservation, and developing a regional MPA directory. The meeting also emphasized expanding stakeholder engagement, improving data sharing, and increasing NEAMPAN's presence in regional and global forums.

8. **The Expert Group Meeting on Marine Mammals** is currently under preparation, scheduled for 11 September 2025 in Incheon, Republic of Korea. This meeting responds directly to the MPA Talk's recommendations and aims to facilitate science-based transboundary cooperation on Cetaceans and Pinnipeds. The meeting will review national policies, share current scientific data and conservation challenges, examine lessons from other regions and MPA

networks, and discuss NEAMPAN's role in supporting collaborative marine mammal conservation in the subregion (Annex III).

Knowledge Dissemination and Outreach Activities

9. The secretariat co-organized a session titled "*Harmonizing Oceans: Transboundary Strategies for Climate Resilience in North-East Asia*" with the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI) at the **East Asia Seas Congress 2024**, on 7 November in Xiamen, China. The session addressed the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems, highlighting the critical role of MPAs in enhancing regional resilience and promoting ecosystem conservation (Annex IV). In addition, the secretariat contributed to other parallel sessions during the Congress, including the MPA workshop organized by the First Institute of Oceanography under the Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources and the China-PEMSEA Center, and a Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA)-led session on "*Strategic Collaboration in tackling the triple planetary crises in the East Asian Seas region*", to foster strategic collaboration within the East Asian Seas Region. The discussions brought together key stakeholders, including Partnerships in the Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), IUCN Asia, and Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (IOC-WESTPAC), reinforcing NEAMPAN's partnerships and advancing regional strategies for sustainable ocean management.

10. Additionally, the secretariat participated in the **UN High-Level Retreat on Investing in Ocean Solutions towards a Brighter Future for the Ocean**, held on 14-15 January 2025 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, and moderated a panel discussion on ocean-based solutions for climate change and biodiversity, including blue carbon ecosystems, MPAs, and ecosystem restoration. The session highlighted the growing global recognition of blue carbon and nature-based solutions as effective approaches that can simultaneously address climate change and biodiversity loss. The discussion also underscored the need to holistically address the climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus, recognizing its complexity and interdependence which provide promising entry points for ESCAP and NEAMPAN support in the area. The Retreat was co-hosted by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in collaboration with the UN Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD).

11. At the **10th Our Ocean Conference**, held from 28-30 April 2025 in Busan, Republic of Korea, the secretariat presented its perspectives by convening and contributing to side events aimed at promoting transboundary marine conservation and regional cooperation. On 30 April 2025, NEAMPAN co-organized a side event titled "*Collaborating for Conservation: Protecting the Yellow Sea's Biodiversity and Ecosystems*", with East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), IUCN Asia-Pacific, Ramsar Regional Center – East Asia (RRC-EA), and Hanns Seidel Foundation

Korea to catalyze joint conservation efforts in the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecoregion. The session emphasized the importance of transboundary and inter-agency collaboration in addressing shared environmental challenges and enhancing biodiversity protection, conservation of migratory species, and ecosystem resilience (Annex V). The secretariat, also, joined another side event titled “*Collective Action in Implementing the 30x30 GBF Targets*”, held on 29 April 2025. Highlighting outcomes from a pre-conference workshop (26-27 April 2025) and the East Asian Seas Congress (November 2024), the session focused on strengthening collaboration among MPA networks across the East Asian Seas, fostering knowledge exchange, and encouraging coordinated action to implement the 30x30 targets.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

12. The Meeting may wish to request member States to:
 - (a) Propose NEAMPAN activities that align with the scope of the Network, as outlined in the Terms of Reference, NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030, Global Biodiversity Framework, SDG 14, and the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030);
 - (b) Indicate their interest in hosting or jointly organizing MPA-related activities;
 - (c) Consider the continuity, familiarity with NEAMPAN, and the willingness of Steering Committee members to actively support NEAMPAN initiative in alignment with its Terms of Reference when appointing replacements, to foster more streamlined communication channels with Steering Committee members and MPA site managers;
 - (d) Encourage additional nomination of NEAMPAN sites, including potential participation from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea through site nominations and/or involvement in NEAMPAN activities; and
 - (e) Review and approve the proposed activity plan (Annex VI).

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