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Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)

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Moscow, Russian Federation

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (e) of the provisional agenda)

Marine Protected Areas

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. The North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) provides a framework for cooperation among member States, marine protected areas (MPAs) and site managers, research institutions, and relevant partners. Through research, technical exchanges, and capacity building, NEAMPAN supports the conservation and effective management of marine and coastal ecosystems in North-East Asia.
2. Marine and coastal ecosystems face pressures from climate change, habitat degradation, and human activities extending beyond individual protected areas. These challenges call for cooperation on ecological connectivity, management approaches, and scientific information. Under the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030, NEAMPAN supports such cooperation and contributes to global and national biodiversity objectives, including through exchanges on MPAs and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs).
3. In line with the activity plan for 2026 approved at SOM-28, work has focused on climate change and MPAs, technical exchanges on marine and coastal conservation, and cooperation with regional and global initiatives, supported by consultations through the NEAMPAN Steering Committee.

II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2026 ACITIVY PLAN

Knowledge Production: Research and Policy Advice

4. The secretariat has advanced analytical work on climate change and MPAs through country studies on China and the Republic of Korea. The studies examine climate-related pressures on marine ecosystems and implications for MPA management, providing a basis for exchanges on adaptation and conservation approaches. They also consider how scientific findings can inform management practices and policy development across the subregion.
5. Both studies have been made available through the NEASPEC website. To disseminate their findings, the secretariat organized the webinar “Climate Change and Marine Protected Areas: Insights from China and the Republic of Korea” on 12 May 2026.

The webinar provided an opportunity for researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders to discuss the findings and their implications for MPA management.

6. The secretariat is consulting with the Russian Federation on a possible study on climate change and MPAs and awaits further advice from the Russian side on the scope and arrangements for this work.

Knowledge Sharing: Capacity-building

7. The NEAMPAN Steering Committee met virtually on 19 March 2026, with members from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation. The Committee reviewed progress and planned activities and expressed general support for expanding the Network's participating sites. Discussions highlighted the need to better understand constraints on participation, improve visibility and practical benefits at the site level, and strengthen engagement with local governments and site managers. Language barriers were also identified as a constraint on participation.

8. Members discussed more frequent Steering Committee meetings and the advisory committee envisaged in the NEAMPAN Terms of Reference, noting that its composition and operational arrangements require further consideration. The secretariat will continue consultations on these matters and on NEAMPAN site expansion. The meeting report is provided in Annex I.

9. The NEAMPAN Workshop on Marine and Coastal OECMs in North-East Asia was held on 24-25 June 2026 in Busan, Republic of Korea. It was jointly organized with Korea Maritime and Ocean University, and the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation, in partnership with the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries of the Republic of Korea. The workshop focuses on the contribution of marine and coastal OECMs to Target 3 of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. A dedicated session also brought youth research and perspectives into the discussions.

10. The workshop equipped participants with knowledge of the criteria, guidance, and assessment tools used to identify potential marine and coastal OECMs and informed them of national policy developments and practical experiences from North-East Asia and other regions. Participants gained insights into monitoring biodiversity outcomes, engaging local communities, and applying OECM approaches in different national and

site-level contexts. Discussions highlighted the complementary roles of MPAs and OECEMs and identified further knowledge sharing, capacity building, and cooperation among practitioners and research institutions as useful areas for follow-up. The meeting report is provided in Annex II.

Knowledge Dissemination: Outreach

11. To maintain the momentum of discussions initiated at the Expert Group Meeting on Advancing Marine Mammal Conservation in North-East Asia, held on 11 September 2025 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, the secretariat continued engaging with experts and partner organizations. It participated in the Korea-China Expert Meeting on Marine Mammal Conservation in the Yellow Sea on 4 December 2025, contributing to discussions on regional cooperation. At the International Symposium on Finless Porpoises in Sacheon, Republic of Korea, on 17-18 September 2026, the secretariat led a policy and partnership discussion to identify opportunities for cross-border research exchanges and practical cooperation on finless porpoise conservation, including at the city and local levels.

12. As part of these continuing exchanges, the secretariat has received a request to explore possible cooperation on an Important Marine Mammal Area (IMMA) identification workshop for the North-West Pacific, tentatively envisaged for November 2028. Possible follow-up is under consideration, and member States' advice is sought on appropriate engagement by NEAMPAN.

13. The secretariat also participated in the International Workshop "Towards 30x30: Asia's Contributions to MPA Expansion and Challenges", held on 5-7 November 2025 in Yeosu, Republic of Korea. The workshop provided an opportunity to share NEAMPAN's experience and exchange views with researchers, civil society organizations, and other partners on MPA expansion, ecological connectivity, and regional cooperation in support of the 30 by 30 goal.

14. The secretariat participated in the national MPA conferences held in Gochang on 22-23 October 2025 and in Yeosu on 14 September 2026. These annual conferences promote awareness of MPAs, strengthen the capacity of site managers, practitioners, and local communities, and facilitate networking among them. At the 2026 conference, the secretariat delivered a presentation on global developments in marine and coastal OECEMs,

drawing on exchanges under NEAMPAN. Participation in these events also provided opportunities to introduce the Network's work and engage with local MPA stakeholders.

15. The secretariat has continued participating in discussions on MPA networking in the East Asian Seas and at the global level. NEAMPAN is contributing to Working Group 3.2 on networks for the sixth International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC6) scheduled for March 2027 in Dakar, Senegal. These exchanges provide opportunities to share subregional experience and identify areas for cooperation with other MPA networks and partners.

16. The secretariat is preparing the special session "From Sites to Seascapes: Strengthening Cooperation for Marine and Coastal Conservation," planned for 27 October 2026 during Asia-Pacific Ocean Week in Bangkok. The session will focus on marine and coastal conservation in the Yellow Sea, including experience from World Heritage sites, and explore opportunities for cooperation among governments, conservation sites, and regional partners. The secretariat also plans to participate in a session on transboundary conservation involving participating institutions of the East Asian Seas MPA Network during the Week.

III. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR 2027

17. Building on the work undertaken in 2026 and the Steering Committee's discussions, the secretariat proposes to strengthen practical capacity building and exchanges among MPA site managers in 2027. Activities could be convened locally in cooperation with interested member States and relevant institutions, using local languages where feasible, based on needs identified through consultations with the Steering Committee and site managers. An in-person Steering Committee meeting is also proposed back-to-back with SOM-30 to review progress and provide guidance on future activities.

18. The secretariat also proposes to continue analytical work on climate change and MPAs, subject to consultations with interested member States, and engage with regional and global mechanisms on MPAs, marine and coastal OECMs and marine mammal conservation. Outreach through events organized by participating sites and relevant national institutions would support awareness raising, strengthen engagement with existing sites and encourage additional MPAs to participate in NEAMPAN. Activities

would be undertaken in consultation with the Steering Committee and relevant partners, taking into account available resources. The proposed activity plan for 2027 is provided in Annex III.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

19. The Meeting may wish to request member States to:

- (a) Take note of the progress made under the marine protected areas programme since SOM-28;
- (b) Provide views and guidance on priorities for further cooperation under NEAMPAN, drawing on Steering Committee discussions;
- (c) Indicate interest in nominating additional participating NEAMPAN sites and contributing expertise or hosting NEAMPAN activities; and
- (d) Review and approve the proposed activity plan for marine protected areas in 2027 (Annex III).

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