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Twenty-first Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

16-17 March 2017

Seoul, Republic of Korea

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

1. The Twenty-First Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC was held in Seoul on 16-17 March 2017. 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 the Republic of Korea.

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 noted the outcomes of the Project "Development of the Technical and Policy Frameworks for Transboundary Air Pollution Assessment and Abatement in North-East Asia", in particular, the proposal of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP). The Meeting recognized the value of NEACAP and the need for the Secretariat to conduct further consultation with member Governments and relevant mechanisms for its future development subject to the availability of financial resources.

4. **Nature Conservation:** The Meeting commended the concrete outcomes and contributions of two projects, “Study on Transborder Movement of Amur Tigers and Leopards using Camera Trapping and Molecular Genetic Analysis”, and “Conservation and Rehabilitation of Habitats for Key Migratory Birds in North-East Asia”, to generating new critical knowledge, building capacity and raising awareness. The Meeting recommended inviting all range countries of Amur tiger and leopard to take part in future activities to enhance knowledge on transborder corridors, more opportunities for non-range countries to participate in the subsequent activities on tiger and leopard, and close consultations with existing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms on migratory birds.

5. As a follow-up to the two projects, the Meeting supported the proposed multistakeholder coordination activities and analytical study under the concept of connectivity conservation. The Meeting also noted that the Korea Environment Institute (KEI) and NEASPEC will implement a study on the environmental and institutional arrangement in transboundary habitats and biodiversity conservation. Mongolia announced its preparation of a Global Environment Facility project under the current 7th Replenishment Cycle (GEF-7) for biodiversity conservation in eastern part of Mongolia and indicated the possibility of joint activities with NEASPEC in the Dauria International Protected Area.

6. **Marine Protected Areas:** The Meeting noted the activities of NEAMPAN including the first workshop and the second Steering Committee Meeting which were held in Suncheon, ROK in 2016. The Meeting also noted the revision of the project proposal by the Russian Federation, “Strengthening the subregional cooperation through knowledge sharing on sustainable management of MPAs”, through incorporating views and suggestions from other member States and endorsed it for the implementation. The delegation of the Russian Federation confirmed the allocation of \$120,000 for the project and urged project to commence as early as possible. The Meeting also noted potential linkages of NEAMPAN with the plan of NOWPAP for strengthening its work on marine biodiversity and the plan of YSLME Project for improving the MPA network in the Yellow Sea. The Meeting also welcomed the offer of the Chinese delegation for hosting a NEAMPAN seminar in 2017.

7. **Low Carbon Cities:** The Meeting noted the significance and considerable potential of low carbon cities for supporting nationally determined contributions under the Paris Climate Agreement and the numerous low carbon city initiatives by NEASPEC member States. The Meeting supported the proposed peer review and comparative study under the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) and recommended constructive evaluation to be made in the proposed review and study. It is also recommended to take account of inconsistencies among relevant indicators. Mongolia requested that Ulaanbaatar city be included in the NEA-LCCP in particular the proposed peer review. In this connection, the Meeting requested all member States to nominate institutions and experts for the work.

8. **Desertification and Land Degradation (DLD):** The Meeting was briefed on the land degradation neutrality (LDN) goal and its linkages with other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Meeting noted the significance of the DLD challenge in the subregion and supported the proposal of the “Study on North-East Asia Land Degradation Neutrality and Sustainable Development”. The Meeting recommended reference be made to soil management such as the tools developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

and urged for cooperation with the FAO Regional office in Bangkok on the DLD issues. Mongolia nominated the Institute of Geography and Geoecology and the Russian Federation nominated its Institute of Geography, Russian Academy of Sciences, to participate in the proposed Study and will further nominate another organization in due course. The Meeting was informed that UNCCD COP-13 will be hosted by China in 2017. China welcomed a NEASPEC side-event to be held during COP-13 and recommended further discussions with the State Forestry Administration.

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 intended contributions of US\$ 50,000 from China, and US\$ 100,000 from the Republic of Korea to the Core Fund in 2017.

10. **Plan for the Next SOM:** The Meeting welcomed the statement of the delegation of China on hosting SOM-22 and noted that the venue and time will be communicated with the Secretariat in due course. The Meeting noted the Secretariat's suggestion for hosting SOM-22 in the first quarter of 2018.

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-21 and also thanked delegations for their active and dedicated participation at the Meeting.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTIETH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING

A. Attendance

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

B. Opening session

2. The Senior Officials Meeting was opened by Mr. Kilaparti Ramakrishna, the Director of the UNESCAP East and North-East Asia Office. He welcomed delegates and expressed gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Korea for the excellent meeting arrangements. He mentioned that with joint efforts, NEASPEC has been strengthening modest but practical environmental cooperation in North-East Asia. NEASPEC has not only strengthened cooperation in transboundary air pollution, nature conservation and desertification and land degradation, but also expanded its scope of work onto new programme areas including low carbon cities and marine protected areas. He highlighted that the Secretariat will enhance its efforts in building partnership with diverse stakeholders and seek renewed support from member governments.

3. The welcoming remarks from the host Government were delivered by Mr. Taeho Lee, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea. He emphasized the significance of

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

the subregion in the global economic and environmental landscape, and that the SOM discussions would have much implication and impact. He regarded NEASPEC as a unique framework and valuable tool for environmental cooperation in North-East Asia that can deliver tangible results. He noted that the Strategic Plan of NEASPEC and the follow-up steps would provide an excellent basis for discussions and looked forward to the adoption of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership. Finally, he expressed his appreciation to the Secretariat and his staff members in preparation of SOM-21.

C. Election of officers

4. The Meeting elected the following officers:

Chair:	Mr. Kwon Sei-joong (Republic of Korea)
Vice-Chair:	Mr. Takahashi Yuichiro (Japan)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Oleg Kobiakov (Russian Federation)

D. Adoption of the agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
 - a) Opening remarks by the Head of ESCAP ENEA Office
 - b) Welcoming remarks by the Host Government
2. Election of officers
3. Adoption of agenda
4. Statements by delegations of member States, UN and international organizations on issues 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. New NEASPEC programmes and activities
7. Review of the Core Fund
8. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the twenty-second SOM
9. Other issues
10. Adoption of the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting

E. Policy issues for sustainable development in North-East Asia
(Agenda item 4)

5. The representative of China highlighted that the subregion is still facing the challenge of imbalanced, uncoordinated and unsustainable development. He emphasized the contribution of NEASPEC in responding to the needs in environmental issues and to strengthen environmental communication and cooperation in the subregion. The representative suggested that NEASPEC should give full play to its advantages by strengthening policy coordination and promoting cooperation with a focus on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and more specifically: (1) NEASPEC should plan for cooperation from a long-term strategic view in line with the SDGs and strengthen experience sharing and practical cooperation in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; (2) NEASPEC should adopt a result-oriented approach and stress on project implementation by firmly promote project cooperation; (3) NEASPEC should explore more financing channels to fund cooperation and developed countries should fulfil their obligations and increase contributions to the fund, China will contribute USD 50,000 to the Core Fund; (4) NEASPEC should strengthen partnership featuring openness and inclusiveness, and should enhance communication and cooperation with other subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms and platforms. The representative also introduced China's development concept featuring innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development; as well as the 13th Five-Year Plan on environmental protection to step up work in this regard. The representative also announced that China will host the International Horticultural Exhibition in 2019 in Beijing and welcomed participation of all countries.

6. The representative of Japan introduced Japan's works in a number of areas: (1) in the area of transboundary air pollution, the Government of Japan has been working closely with other countries including under the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting of China, Japan and Republic of Korea through political dialogue and joint study. The Government has also worked with the Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership (APCAP) as well as carrying out continuous component analysis of PM2.5 in Japan; (2) the Ministry of Environment of Japan (MOE) will promote activities of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) across East Asia, and will work towards the establishment of MPA in response to the important marine areas identified by the Government in April 2016; (3) The MOE announced "Japan's Assistance Initiatives to Address Climate Change" and provides assistance to developing countries to support their transition into post-carbon societies and build sustainable cities by evaluating and promoting low carbon businesses; (4) The Ministry together with China and Republic of Korea has undertaken joint research on the forecasting of yellow dust.

7. The representative of Mongolia emphasized that international cooperation in addressing environmental challenges is one of the key priorities of Mongolia. The representative expressed appreciation on the invitation to Mongolia in the transboundary air pollution dialogue, and highlighted that transboundary protected areas are a key area for multilateral cooperation. The representative noted the degree of desertification and land degradation in Mongolia which threatens 78% of its territory; and mentioned that Mongolia

is working on its transition to green and sustainable development. The representative informed that Mongolia will conduct an Environmental Performance Review (EPR) and Sustainability Outlook of Mongolia with support from ESCAP and ECE.

8. The representative of the Republic of Korea (ROK) noted that ROK is a strong supporter of NEASPEC. The representative suggested that, in addition to the welcoming remarks by Deputy Minister Mr. Taeho Lee, NEASPEC should emphasize its future role in connection with the SDGs and global processes of the international community, which will increase the visibility and impact of NEASPEC.

9. The representative of the Russian Federation mentioned that NEASPEC has made tremendous progress since 1993 and the subregion is facing even greater environmental challenges that require further cooperation. He highlighted the need to expand cooperation in NEASPEC such as in the nature conservation programme area and stressed that the NEASPEC initiatives in transboundary air pollution and low carbon cities are important for the subregion. Moreover, he looked forward to the endorsement of the proposed project for marine protected area. The representative also mentioned that the Russian Federation nominates its Institute of Geography, the Russian Academy of Sciences, to participate in the desertification and land degradation (DLD) proposed study.

10. Mr. Michael Bordt, Regional Advisor on Environment Statistics of ESCAP, and Ms. Rikke Munk Hansen, Chief of Statistics Division, ESCAP, presented on the needs of integrated information to enable integrated decision-making as well as the collaborations required among the policy, science and statistics sectors. They also shared the outcomes of the Workshop on environment statistics for countries in East and North-East Asia, held in Incheon on 13-15 March. Outcomes from the Workshop include priority concerns of countries and their linkages with SDGs; shared constraints and opportunities for cooperation identified in the workshop e.g. on joint study and exchange of experiences.

F. Presentations and discussions on substantive agenda items (Agenda items 5, 6 and 7)

11. The Meeting had presentations from the Secretariat on agenda item 5: Review of programme planning and implementation; agenda item 6: Review of the Strategic Plan of NEASPEC; and agenda item 7: Review of the core fund; followed by interventions from member States. Key outcomes of discussions on the agenda items are included as the Conclusions and Recommendation in the Report of the Meeting.

12. On Agenda item 5, the Meeting also had presentations from four experts and resource persons described in the following paragraphs and a video presented by the Korea Forest Service (KFS) on its desertification works in the Kubuqi Desert in China.

13. Mr. Nyambayar Batbayar, Director of Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia (WSCC), introduced WSCC's works in the conservation of White-naped Cranes including under NEASPEC's nature conservation project. WSCC's works suggested that eastern Mongolia is a key habitat for the breeding of multiple species of crane yet has not

been declared as a protected area. He presented a number of recommendations including population monitoring, species connectivity project to protect a number of key sites, coordinated counts, guidelines for site management as well as training of young scientists.

14. Mr. Yinfeng Guo, Chief Technical Adviser and Manager of UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem (YSLME) Phase II Project, introduced the four key project components of YSLME on ensuring regional and national cooperation for ecosystem-based management and improving ecosystem carrying capacity with respect to provisioning services, cultural services and supporting services. He also highlighted the planned works on marine protected area network under the Project.

15. Ms. Min Hu, Executive Director of Innovative Green Development Program (iGDP), introduced China's low carbon city national initiatives and progress, and the significance of these initiatives in meeting China's climate targets. She also showcased iGDP's works on analysing China's low carbon pilot cities including the policies and action gaps in comparison to cities in other countries. She also shared the identified opportunities for collaboration among North-East Asian cities including an integrated quantitative analysis of carbon mitigation potentials, peer learning mechanism, performance tracking system and smart financing platform.

16. Ms. Hyun-Ah Choi, Senior Researcher of Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), presented HSF's works on migratory bird conservation in DPRK including the first international bird survey at the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve jointly carried out with NEASPEC in 2014. The survey is followed-up by a number of awareness-raising events and other joint research in 2016. She shared a number of proposed activities by HSS to NEASPEC on joint bird survey in the Tumen River Area and joint workshop for the conservation of migratory birds

17. In addition to the presentations, Mr. Spike Millington, Chief Executive of East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAFP), and Mr. Lev Neretin, Senior Coordinator of Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) made interventions on nature conservation and MPA, respectively. Mr. Millington mentioned that the NEASPEC project on migratory birds generated good reports for conservation and supported the proposal on connectivity conservation. EAAFP would be happy to work with NEASPEC in the development of activities. In particular, he supported the transboundary initiatives and suggested that site-based and site-specific initiatives would be valuable. He highlighted that a habitat-focused approach could benefit other species with added impact. Mr. Millington further proposed for NEASPEC to consider regularizing capacity building of young people including but not limited to young scientists. Mr. Neretin informed that NOWPAP mid-term strategy 2018-2023 would strengthen work on marine and coastal biodiversity, and thus indicated strengthening NOWPAP's cooperation with NEAMPAN. He advised NEAMPAN to build linkages between MPAs and integrated coastal management, as well as connecting its projects with conservation issues.

**G. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the Twenty-second Senior Officials Meeting
(Agenda item 8)**

18. The Meeting discussed the venue, date and agenda of the twenty-first Senior Officials Meeting. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Government of China for generously offering to host the next Meeting in 2018. The proposed dates, venue and the provisional agenda would be announced by the Secretariat in consultation with the host Government in due course.

**H. Other matters
(Agenda item 9)**

19. The Meeting expressed appreciation to the Government of Republic of Korea for generously hosting the Twenty-First 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)**

20. The Meeting adopted the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Senior Officials Meeting on 17 March 2017. 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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