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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Twenty-fourth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

12-13 October 2020

Virtual meeting

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

1. The Twenty-fourth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC was held on 12-13 October 2020 and virtually hosted by the Russian Federation. The Meeting was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia serving as NEASPEC Secretariat and was chaired by the Government of the Russian Federation.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Meeting commended the contribution of NEASPEC to promoting subregional environmental cooperation and institutionalizing transboundary cooperation as a comprehensive intergovernmental cooperation framework in North-East Asia. The Meeting reaffirmed the commitments of member States to enhancing national actions towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, strengthening subregional approach to environmental cooperation, and creating synergies among multi-stakeholders and relevant mechanisms to expedite actions on subregional and global environmental challenges such as climate change and biodiversity conservation.

3. **Transboundary Air Pollution:** The Meeting noted the report of the Second Meeting of the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) Science and Policy Committee (SPC) and Technical Centres (SPC-2) held on 2-3 June 2020, and adopted the draft NEACAP Work Plan 2021-2025 as recommended by the SPC-2. The Meeting noted the mandate and work of SPC to regularly review and plan activities to make the NEACAP work better respond to the need of cooperation. In this regard, SOM requested the SPC to initiate the timely implementation of the current Work Plan¹

¹ Secretariat note: According to the NEACAP Terms of Reference, it should be read as the secretariat, not the SPC, that is responsible for the timely implementation. The TOR defines the SPC role as to “plan, monitor and review activities”. This point was clarified and inserted after the adoption of the Conclusions and Recommendations by the SPC Chair and the Secretariat. This footnote is reviewed and approved by the member Governments.

and have a mid-term review in 2022 with a view of making necessary adjustments. The Meeting also agreed on the need for the SPC to discuss, in the timeframe agreed upon by all SPC members, the priority areas of Category II, and submit their recommendation to the SOM before the mid-term review in 2022.

The Meeting welcomed the voluntary initiative of the NEACAP Technical Center of the Republic of Korea (ROK) for providing technical and training programme by hosting experts from other member States. The Meeting also noted the view of the EANET Secretariat on the potential of collaboration between EANET and NEACAP on sharing information and avoiding duplications.

4. **Nature Conservation:** The Meeting noted the progress in the implementation of the new NEASPEC project on the transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard in North-East Asia, and shared further information on the relevant bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The Meeting noted the interest of non-range member States in participating in the project including through providing technical support.

5. The Meeting commended the progress on promoting transboundary cooperation among protected wetlands in the Tumen Estuary based on the preliminary study and the outcome of the expert group meeting in May 2020. The Meeting supported the proposed activities for institutionalizing the transboundary cooperation in Tumen Estuary as an independent project and providing financial and expert support and agreed to nominate national experts and focal points for further consultations among governments and multi-stakeholders in 2021.

6. The Meeting welcomed the proposal for organizing relevant outreach activities of NEASPEC during the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD COP-15) in May 2021, China, and the 14th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP14) in November 2021, China.

7. **Marine Protected Areas:** The Meeting emphasized the importance of effective management of marine protected areas, while recognizing the global level agenda such as the Aichi Target and the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework on marine protected areas. The Meeting noted the support of member States on the need to expand the target marine protected areas (MPA) of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN). The Meeting also guided the secretariat to further strengthen capacity building activities through experience sharing. The focus of such activities may include the effective management of MPAs, socio-economic management of MPAs, and eco-tourism. The Meeting also recommended more active and effective use of online tools in these activities.

8. **Low Carbon Cities:** The Meeting highlighted the significance of involving diverse stakeholders including cities in climate action and noted the relevance and value of the study and peer review undertaken under the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP). The Meeting commended the plan to implement the recommendation of SOM-23 to expand the current work to include cities in Mongolia and the Russian Federation. The Meeting noted the interest and offer of member States to share their experiences in low carbon city development and to enhance cooperation among cities through modalities such as experience sharing and technical cooperation.

9. **Desertification and Land Degradation (DLD):** The Meeting agreed on refocusing NEASPEC's work on DLD on the interlinkage with other sectors, such as climate change and

biodiversity conservation, and to develop a subregional approach and organize activities on Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) to create the synergies among actions on addressing DLD and climate change while avoiding duplications of efforts with the Northeast Asia Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN). The Meeting welcomed the offer by the ROK to host an Expert Group Meeting in conjunction with the 15th World Forestry Congress to be held in May 2021 to further elaborate the proposed activities.

10. **NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025:** The Meeting adopted the draft NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025 with amendments and noted the full support of member States and the request of ESCAP to present it to the Environment and Development Committee session to be held in December 2020 as a concrete example of subregional environmental cooperation.

11. The Meeting reviewed the recommendations and secretariat response of the independent evaluation of NEASPEC and decided to hold a National Focal Point meeting to develop and agree on concrete implementation plan for addressing the evaluation recommendations with clear responsibilities and timelines, as proposed by the Secretariat.

12. **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 contributions of USD 44,985 from China, and the USD 245,727 from the ROK to the Core Fund in 2020. The Meeting also appreciated the Russian Federation for the contribution of USD 337,081 for the nature conservation project. The Meeting accepted the financial report and approved the proposed programme planning and management including the budget plan for the development of the project document for 2021-2025 in accordance with the ESCAP procedure.

13. **Plan for the Next SOM:** The Meeting welcomed the statement of Japan to host SOM-25, noting that the venue and time will be consulted with and communicated to Member States and the Secretariat in due course. The format of the SOM-25 will be further considered taking account of the COVID-19 pandemic while the Government wishes to host the meeting in Japan. The Meeting also noted the expectation of member States for fruitful outcomes of the next SOM.

14. **Other issues:** The Meeting welcomed the proposal from the ROK for holding National Focal Point meeting more frequently, at least one meeting prior to the SOM for the preparation and the review of the progress in implementation of NEASPEC programmes by utilizing virtual conference. The Meeting also welcomed the indication of Mongolia for hosting meetings on air pollution and land degradation, respectively, if the condition of the COVID-19 pandemic allows.

15. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the host/chair government and the Chair for the successful conduct of the Meeting despite the technical difficulties of the virtual meeting. The Chair expressed her appreciation to the Secretariat for its preparatory work for the SOM-24 and thanked delegations for their active and dedicated participation at the Meeting.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING

A. Attendance

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

B. Opening session

17. The Senior Officials Meeting was opened by Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head of ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. He welcomed delegates for the flexibility in organizing the meeting virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed gratitude to the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting the meeting. Noting the results of the independent NEASPEC evaluation in 2020, he underscored the need to revamp the current institutional arrangements of NEASPEC to enhance its performance; remodel the way countries engage in NEASPEC to unleash the potentials of this comprehensive intergovernmental cooperation mechanism; and align subregional environmental cooperation with the lessons learnt and commitments to building back better from COVID-19 for an inclusive and green recovery. He also called for scaling up the support and financing to make NEASPEC a full-fledged mechanism, that supports member States delivering on national pledges and global goals on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change and biodiversity.

18. Ms. Irina Fominykh, Deputy Director, Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment of the Russian Federation, delivered the welcoming remarks on behalf of the host Government. Regretting to convene the 24th Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC in the virtual set-up, Ms. Fominykh said the meeting held during the pandemic demonstrates that the focus and commitments of North-East Asian countries on the environment and sustainable development agenda remains untouched. She stressed that combating climate change, air pollution, desertification and land degradation, conserving the biological diversity and achieving sustainable development remain an integral of the global agenda, and called for the member States of NEASPEC to commit to common goals and take urgent action despite the COVID lock-down.

C. Election of officers

19. The Meeting elected the following officers:

Chair:	Ms. Irina Fominykh (the Russian Federation)
Vice-Chair:	Ms. Ariuntuya Dorjsuren (Mongolia)
Rapporteur:	Mr. Ryuzo Sugimoto (Japan)

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
 - a) Transboundary Air Pollution
 - b) Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas
 - c) Marine Protected Areas
 - d) Low Carbon Cities
 - e) Desertification and Land Degradation
6. NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025
7. Review of the Core Fund
8. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the twenty-fifth 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)

20. The representative of China commended the positive contributions of NEASPEC to environmental protection and sustainable development in North-East Asia. Noting the impact of rising unilateralism, protectionism and bullying practices, as well as the sudden attack of COVID-19, he underscored the need to uphold multilateralism, deepen global partnership, take the interests and concerns of all parties into consideration, and strictly follow the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”, equity and respective capabilities; incorporate the SDGs into mid-to-long term national development strategies to enhance synergy in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; and deepen practical cooperation and promote common and sustainable development in North-East Asia. Reaffirming China’s commitments on global environment and climate governance, he highlighted that China will adopt more vigorous policies and measures to scale up its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC) towards achieving CO₂ emissions peak before 2030 and carbon neutrality before 2060, and invited more countries to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to make full use of potential resources to promote the 2030 Agenda. Noting the critical role of sufficient and reliable financing, he suggested countries taking joint efforts to innovate the financing methods, broadening financing sources, and

seeking support from more countries and international funds outside the region. He also expressed continued support and annual contribution of USD 45,000 to the Core Fund of NEASPEC.

21. The representative of Japan introduced the SDGs implementation strategy developed in line with the revised “SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles” and the associated “SDGs Action Plan 2020”, which includes key initiatives to incorporate the SDGs into corporate management and support for ESG investments, promote measures against marine plastic litter to achieve the “Osaka Blue Ocean Vision” endorsed at the G20 Osaka Summit in 2019, and implement climate change policies and measures in line with Japan’s Long-term Low Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emission Development Strategy (LEDS) under the Paris Agreement. He highlighted the efforts of diffusing low carbon technologies internationally through the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM), promoting environmental infrastructure by utilizing Japan’s environmental technologies internationally to achieve the SDGs, and developing cross-sectoral measures that engage the private sector to achieve simultaneous solution to economic and social issues through environmental policy as a “new growth” model.

22. The representative of Mongolia shared the experience of halting air pollution by 50% in Ulaanbaatar via banning the raw coal consumption in 2019, and the plan to further reduce air pollution by 80% by 2040. Noting the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), she said Mongolia has prioritized actions on restoring rangeland and welcomed countries to support such actions as part of the efforts on addressing the subregional challenge on land degradation. She highlighted Mongolia’s recently adopted “Sustainable Development Vision 2050”, as a national green development strategy developed with the support of ESCAP; the mitigation and adaptation efforts committed in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC); and the inception of two projects funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) on sustainable dryland conservation and peatland management, which include three Ramsar Sites as well as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in the border areas with China and the Russian Federation. Stressing the interlinkage between climate change and biodiversity conservation, she expressed full support on the nature-based solutions (NBS) as the targeted solutions to multiple regional and global environmental challenges, and suggested the Meeting to make progressive decision on combating air pollution in North-East Asia.

23. Highlighting the need to build back better and greener from the COVID-19 pandemic, the representative of the ROK introduced a “Green New Deal”, a national strategy totaled USD 60 billion of investments to support actions on green infrastructure, low-carbon and decentralized energy, and innovation in green industry. He said this project-based implementation-oriented recovery plan is expected to create more than 650,000 jobs and reduce more than 10 million tons of GHG emissions by 2025. He also introduced the seasonal air pollution control scheme suggested by the National Council on Climate and Air Quality (NCCA), and highlighted the commemoration of the first International Day of Clean Air for blue skies on 7 September 2020 for raising public awareness on international cooperation on air pollution. He called for enhanced efforts on information and data sharing, better coordination and collaboration on policy and mitigation measures to address the regional air pollution challenge. He reaffirmed ROK’s commitment to make NEASPEC more effective and a success of multilateralism in North-East Asia.

24. The representative of the Russian Federation underlined the ongoing legislation on green financing, and the role of private sector and civil society engagement in the conservation and

sustainable use of biological diversity including through the Public and Private Partnership (PPP). She introduced Russia's biodiversity conservation approach of developing and strengthening the system of specially protected natural areas, which covers 15.53% of the national areas, for preserving and restoring areas for rare and endangered species of animals and plants, and the goal to create another 24 new specially protected natural areas with a total area of 5 million hectares by 2024. She also introduced the role of national forest management for biodiversity conservation and for climate change adaptation and water management including in the transboundary areas. She emphasized the role of indigenous people and their traditional experience and knowledge in sustainable environmental management. She suggested biodiversity conservation and its sustainable use be implemented on a non-discriminatory basis based on the existing international legal architecture and universally recognized and reliable scientific data, and that effective targets be developed in the future global biodiversity framework in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Meeting also welcomed the announcement on the publication of the 2020 Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda by the Russian Federation.

F. Presentations and discussions on substantive agenda items

(Agenda items 5, 6 and 7)

25. The Meeting heard presentations from resource person and the Secretariat on agenda item 5: Review of programme planning and implementation, agenda item 6: NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025, and agenda item 7: Review of the Core Fund, followed by interventions from member States, international organizations and partner organizations. Key outcomes of discussions on these agenda items are included in Section I: Conclusions and Recommendations of the present Report of the Meeting.

Agenda item 5 (a) Transboundary Air Pollution

26. The Meeting noted the successful convening of SPC-2 in June 2020 to discuss the priority areas and their respective goals and activities of NEACAP, and reviewed the draft NEACAP Work Plan 2021-2025 as recommended by the SPC-2.

27. The Meeting heard a brief introduction on the NEACAP organizational structure, the SPC process, the draft NEACAP Work Plan, and the SPC recommendations from Mr. Takashi Ohmura, Chair of NEACAP SPC. He highlighted a phased approach to advance NEACAP's work taking into account priority areas that bring immediate benefits without specific intensive preparatory work (Category I), and those duly important areas requiring scientific and collaborative preparation and the development of capacity of experts (Category II), as suggested by the SPC-2.

28. The representative of the Russian Federation, also the Vice-Chair of the NEACAP SPC, expressed gratitude to the Chair and members of the SPC for developing the final document following complex discussion and consultations. Highlighting NEACAP as a pioneering mechanism that provides policy instruments to member governments to tackle air pollution at the subregional level, he urged the Meeting to support the draft NEACAP Work Plan as recommended by the SPC to allow NEACAP begin its substantive work.

29. The representative of the ROK emphasized that all the identified priority areas, including

scientific research on emission inventory and policy scenario and integrate assessment modelling (Category II), are in line with the core programmes specified in the Terms of Reference (TOR) of NEACAP adopted at SOM-22, and called for implementing the priority areas identified in both Categories to avoid further delay of operationalizing NEACAP. Noting the on-going discussion on expanding the scope of work of the Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET) to address air pollution, he urged the Meeting to begin the timely implementation of the NEACAP TOR already adopted in 2018 while the expansion of work of EANET is yet to be agreed upon by its member Governments. Noting the importance of moving forward to start programmatic cooperation under NEACAP, the representative of Mongolia, with the representatives from China and the Russian Federation, supported to adopt the Work Plan as recommended by the SPC-2.

30. Emphasizing on the need to implement priority areas identified under Category I and Category II at the same time, the representative of the ROK proposed, and the Meeting agreed, to resume discussion under this agenda item after the consideration and adoption of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

31. In the ensuing discussion, the representative of the Russian Federation, with Mongolia, highlighted the consensus approach undertaken by the NEASPEC and that the mid-term review in 2022 as currently suggested in the draft Work Plan could accommodate the need to adjust the work plan.

32. Saying the document should be inclusive and respecting the various priorities of member States, the representative of the ROK stressed that the text should avoid cherry-picking in the name of prioritization, and be fully in line with the TOR of NEACAP following a phased and differentiated approach considering the different nature of the work and level of readiness of participating members. He then proposed to include Category II into the NEACAP Work Plan with the elements of preparatory works and necessary capacity building activities by operationalizing ad-hoc expert group for three years. He further suggested shortening the time framework of the first Work Plan from 2021-2025 to 2021-2023 to intensively implement the NEACAP programme without further delay.

33. The representative of Mongolia, with China and the Russian Federation, stated reservation in altering the timeframe of the suggested Work Plan. The representative of the Russian Federation, with Mongolia and the ROK, also considered shifting the mid-term review from 2022 to 2021.

34. The representative of China indicated agreement, in the spirit of cooperation and compromise, to include Category II for the potential priority areas of the NEACAP work plan. He asked the SPC to further discuss the Category II to fully address member states' concerns. He also mentioned that member states could utilize the mid-term review in 2022 to make adjustments on a consensus basis, if necessary.

35. Secretariat clarified that the mid-term review should be based on the actual implementation of substantive activities, and that additional views of member States could also be elaborated in the conclusions and recommendations of the Meeting rather than amending the draft Work Plan. The Chair of NEACAP SPC suggested adopting the Work Plan as recommended and that the Meeting could mandate the SPC in line with the NEACAP TOR to plan, review and recommend further activities to the Senior Officials Meeting.

36. After expressing his flexibility on the timing of the mid-term review, the representative of the ROK said he would accept the draft Work Plan recommended by the SPC if the Meeting agrees to request the SPC to further discuss priority areas of Category II, develop elements of all necessary collaborative preparatory activities and capacity building programmes, and submit their recommendation to the SOM-25, and proposed such a mandate to be included in the conclusions and recommendation of the Meeting. Without any objection to the ROK's proposal, the Meeting adopted the draft NEACAP Work Plan 2021-2025 as recommended by the SPC without amendment.

37. The representative of the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES) underlined from a research perspective that the draft NEACAP Work Plan is well situated to support evidence-based policy making not only in North-East Asia but could also benefit similar developments in other subregions, such as the ASEAN.

38. The representative of the EANET Secretariat introduced the continuous and close communication and information sharing with the NEACAP Secretariat, and that the EANET is finalizing the Mid-Term Plan 2021-2025 which will be approved by the 22nd Intergovernmental Meeting of EANET in November 2020. He expressed the interest in establishing potential collaboration with NEACAP to avoid duplication and forge synergies.

Agenda item 5 (b) Nature Conservation in Transboundary Areas

39. Noting the progress achieved by NEASPEC in nature conservation, the Meeting reviewed the inception and implementation of the umbrella project on "Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards in North-East Asia" funded by the Russian Federation, and considered the primary findings and proposed activities for institutionalizing the transboundary conservation in the Tumen River estuary for migratory birds and their habitats.

40. On the feline project, the representative of the ROK indicated strong interest in the project implementation and outcomes, saying that the habitats of the Amur tigers and leopards may expand to the Korean peninsula in the future. He suggested the project progress be regularly circulated through the Secretariat; the implementing agencies inviting experts from interested member countries in the further implementation of the project; and that the ROK is ready to provide technical supports to carry out this project. On the conservation of migratory birds and habitats, noting that the Tumen River estuary is a critical breeding ground for migratory birds in North-East Asia and that protecting the area is critical for the subregional transboundary cooperation, he expressed appreciation to the member States for their efforts on preserving the habitats in the Tumen River estuary, and stated support in developing meaningful project in this area in the near future, including to carry out ecological research and habitat management activities.

41. The representative of the Russian Federation commented on the progress of the umbrella project on felines and supported all the proposed activities on protecting endangered species. She expressed thanks to China for the interest and support for consultation on the possible transboundary collaboration, and appreciated the ROK for the current bilateral cooperation on habitat restoration and possible support for a new project.

42. Noting the flagship species as indicators of the health of the ecosystem, the representative of

Mongolia shared key developments on the designation of key sites for migratory birds as protected areas, and the drafting process of the migratory birds action plan in Mongolia. In line with the pledge of the National Biodiversity Action Plan that 30 per cent of the national territory should be designated as protected areas by 2030, she said similar action plans on the protection of endangered species and mammals will be developed soon. On the protection of feline species, she said relevant camera trapping data on the assessment of subpopulations of snow leopards participated by Mongolia is already shared and reflected in the project progress.

43. On the conservation of felines, the representative of China introduced the recent bilateral cooperation between China and the Russian Federation on the conservation of Amur tigers and leopards, including: jointly organized a side-event with the NEASPEC Secretariat at the International Symposium on Cross-border Conservation of Tigers and Leopards hosted by China in 2019; and based on which, developed a bilateral cooperation project on “North-East Asia Amur Tiger and Leopards Cross-border Protection Cooperation” with the Russian Federation in July 2020. He further introduced that the project implementation plan has been formulated and cross-border population and habitat monitoring activities have been carried out in Xiaoxingan (Lesser Khingan) mountains and other regions. Moving forward, he said China will strengthen its policy and position coordination under relevant international mechanisms with the Russian Federation.

44. The representative of China welcomed the inclusion of the wetland conservation in the Tumen River estuary in the draft NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025. She introduced China’s engagement in the current initiative through national experts in the research and in the process of drafting the new Strategic Plan of NEASPEC. She stated support for continuing the initiative and suggested further work be organized through a standing alone project to be approved with the support from the Secretariat.

45. The representative of the Hann Seidel Foundation commended the current progress on cooperation and coordination among multi-stakeholders for forging transboundary cooperation among protected wetlands, including with the DPRK, in the Tumen River estuary. Noting ESCAP as a significant platform to carry out further activities in this regard, he suggested international and partner organizations continue to be engaged, and include representatives from the DPRK where possible, such as through a side-event at the COP15 of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The representative of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) suggested consolidating the existing achievements by nominating the sites considered as the EAAFP Flyway Site Network.

Agenda item 5 (c) Marine Protected Areas

46. The Meeting noted the difficulties encountered in carrying out NEAMPAN activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including Steering Committee meeting that China was planning to host. The Meeting highlighted the great importance of improving MPA management and sharing experiences among the MPAs.

47. The representative of China informed the administrative change of MPA management authority to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, which is now tasked to draft and amend legislation and regulations related to protected areas, including drafting of law on protected areas and national parks and amending the regulation on natural reserves. He also introduced the

scope of integration and optimization of protected areas in China, which covers over 10,000 protected areas with some overlap or conflict in use of MPA. He shared the plan of active participation in NEAMPAN related activities especially in capacity building and sharing experiences of MPAs, as well as the consideration to increase MPA sites for the network.

48. The representative of the Russian Federation emphasized the importance of the NEAMPAN project funded by the Russian government, and recognized the need to expand the list of MPAs with diverse geographic and ecological condition.

49. The representative of the ROK introduced the plan to continue to share their experiences and best practices in MPA management and recognized the importance of NEAMPAN activities contributing to the achievement of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework targets through protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. He also recognized the need to expand the NEAMPAN sites to share information and analysis more widely and develop innovative projects. He suggested future activities of NEAMPAN focus on the development of experience-based training and eco-tourism programmes on the current NEAMPAN sites; development of an online application platform to join the network; and enhanced and effective use of online instruments such as the NEASPEC websites and social media for awareness raising and experience sharing.

Agenda item 5 (d) Low Carbon Cities

50. The Meeting noted the progress of the NEA-LCCP activities, including: the peer review for Gwangju Metropolitan City, the Republic of Korea; the collaboration with the team of the research project on “China-Japan-Korea cities climate action towards decarbonization and sustainable development”, launched the Tripartite Environment Ministers Meeting (TEMM); and follow-up to the SOM-23 decision on the organization of a workshop for Ulan-Ude and Irkutsk cities of the Russian Federation.

51. Saying the NEA-LCCP is a very important initiative, the representative of the Russian Federation informed the Meeting that some regions in the Russian Federation expressed their interest in participating in the LCCP activities.

52. The representative of the ROK appreciated the efforts taken by the Platform to follow-up on the previous SOM decision amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and suggested continuing the support for joint research and policy dialogue and for promoting the LCCP by identifying specialized institutes and experts on climate change and low carbon city transition. Expressing support in developing concrete ideas, the representative of the Korea Environment Institute (KEI) introduced the outcomes of the TEMM’s joint research. He shared the following four success factors. That is, science-based approach with quantitative targeting and monitoring actions should be taken even in the very local level; engaging stakeholders in the field to allow more ambitious visioning and targeting; horizontally collaborating and enhancing coordinated local actions within local governments to improve implementation through strategy and budget planning and sharing roles and responsibilities; and taking a co-benefit approach to local climate action.

53. The representative of Japan recognized the importance of the city to city collaborations. He said the government has already shared knowledge of advanced cities through the joint study

undertaken by the TEMM. Stressing the role of local government commitments and supports, he reported that the government promotes zero carbon cities and that 158 prefectures and cities accounting for more than half of the total population of the country already committed to zero carbon. Noting the importance of the LCCP in knowledge transfer and experience sharing, he suggested engaging in-kind cooperation and providing technical support in such activities. He also suggested replicating the results of existing efforts through bilateral and multilateral cooperation channels among member States, and carefully reviewing the needs for new resources for possible new activities.

54. The representative of China appreciated the progress and achievements of LCC projects. He introduced that China has approved three batches of pilot Low Carbon Cities and Provinces, respectively in 2010, 2012 and 2015, and that the scheme now covers 6 provinces and 81 cities. Underlining the role of low carbon cities in climate actions, he suggested future LCCP work contribute to low carbon city development in North-East Asia.

Agenda item 5 (e) Desertification and Land Degradation

55. The Meeting reviewed the overall developments of DLD activities under the NEASPEC implemented since 2003, and considered refocusing NEASPEC's work on DLD on the interlinkage of land degradation and climate change, including developing a subregional approach and activities on nature-based solutions to create the synergies among actions on addressing DLD, climate change, and biodiversity conservation.

56. Noting that the government is considering the inclusion of land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) activities in the updated NDC to the Paris Agreement, the representative of the ROK supported the proposed direction of the programme, and suggested NEASPEC's future work on DLD be based on scientific research on the release and absorption of GHG emissions by the land-based ecosystem, sustainable land management in relation to climate change, desertification and land degradation, and food security. He offered to host an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) in the format of a side-event of the 15th World Forestry Congress in May 2021 to further elaborate the proposed activities.

57. The representative of Mongolia, with China, also supported focusing NEASPEC's work on DLD on the nexus with climate change. The representative of Mongolia introduced the relevant projects funded by the GEF and the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and stated support in engaging in the further planning of specific activities. The representative of China suggested the future work of DLD also support member States developing new national reporting under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

Agenda item 6. NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025

58. The Meeting reviewed the draft NEASPEC Strategic Plan revised based on the discussion at the NEASPEC National Focal Points Meeting held in August 2020, and considered the recommendations resulted from the NEASPEC external evaluation carried out in 2020.

Agenda item 6 (a) Strategic Plan

59. Noting that the current draft of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025 have reflected the suggestions from all member States, the representative of China stated full support in adopting the plan and suggested NEASPEC fully leveraging the advantages of the cooperation mechanism to unleash cooperation potential for multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral subregional environmental cooperation.

60. The representative of the ROK, with Mongolia, stated supported on the current draft, and proposed to include circular economy as an emerging issue and possible new programme area, subject to consultation to identify specific areas for cooperation and a subregional study to review the progress on circular economy. Another representative of the ROK highlighted the importance of avoiding duplication with other mechanisms on NEASPEC's future work on DLD.

61. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed reservation on including circular economy into the new NEASPEC Strategic Plan, saying the concept is yet to be clarified at the global level. The Meeting agreed to adopt the draft Strategic Plan with the addition of avoiding duplications with other mechanisms on DLD as suggested by the ROK.

62. The representative of ESCAP delivered a congratulatory remark on the adoption of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025, and invited NEASPEC to present its achievements and the Strategic Plan at the Sixth Session of the ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development to be held virtually on 9-10 December 2020. He said ESCAP will benefit from the strengthened link between subregional environmental cooperation and ESCAP Headquarters, and he expected to identify further opportunities to cooperate with subregional member States in the area of environment and development.

Agenda item 6 (b) NEASPEC Evaluation

63. The Meeting considered the conclusions and recommendations of the independent evaluation and the ESCAP management responses to the recommendations.

64. The Representative of the ROK requested the Secretariat to share the information in advance so that the government can be in a better position to provide concrete ideas. He said that most of the points raised by the evaluation are appropriate, given the circumstances that the NEASPEC faces challenges to improve not only substantive areas for collaboration but also optimizing the procedures to find best possible solutions for the effective implementation of its projects. He supported the Secretariat proposal to hold an ad-hoc meeting, and suggested the meeting be joined by the national focal points to address suggestions and outcome of the evaluation. He also suggested organizing national focal points meeting more regularly to prepare for the annual SOM meeting.

65. The Meeting agreed on the Secretariat proposal to further discuss and develop a concrete action plan for addressing the evaluation recommendations by holding a National Focal Points Meeting.

Agenda item 7. Review of the Core Fund

66. The Meeting considered the Secretariat's report on NEASPEC Core Fund and project-based fund and a new budget plan for 2021-2025.

67. The representative of the ROK reported that the government had contributed a total of USD 1.7 million to the NEASPEC Core Fund from 2000 to 2019, another USD 245,000 to the Core Fund in 2020, and will continue its contribution to support effective subregional environmental cooperation. He encouraged other member States to provide financial support, and introduced specific contribution to a capacity building and training programme to be provided by the National Institute of Environmental Research (NIER) of the ROK in support of the operation of NEACAP.

68. The representative of Mongolia expressed her appreciation to the member States who have provided either direct or in-direct contributions to the NEASPEC. Acknowledging that Mongolia has benefited from this subregional cooperation, she supported the NIER's proposal for human and technical capacity building on air pollution.

G. Venue, date, and provisional agenda of the Twenty-fifth Senior Officials Meeting

(Agenda item 8)

69. The Meeting discussed the venue, date, and agenda of the Twenty-fifth Session of the Senior Officials Meeting of NEASPEC. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Government of Japan for generously offering to host the next Meeting with the format of the meeting to be confirmed considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed dates, venue and the provisional agenda will be announced by the Secretariat in consultation with the host Government and other member States in due course.

H. Other Issues

(Agenda item 9)

70. The representative of the ROK emphasized the need to improve the governmental consultation process, and suggested holding National Focal Points Meeting as often as possible for the timely and effective consultations among member States.

71. The Meeting considered the proposal made by the ROK and agreed to organize at least one National Focal Points Meeting by utilizing virtual conference well in advance of the next Senior Officials Meeting to discuss the preparatory work.

72. The Meeting also considered and welcomed the proposal from Mongolia for hosting respective meetings on air pollution and land degradation should the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic allows.

I. Adoption of the Report

(Agenda item 10)

73. The Meeting expressed deep appreciation to the Government of the Russian Federation for hosting/chairing the Twenty-fourth Session of the Senior Officials Meeting despite the challenge of

the COVID-19, and to the Secretariat for the excellent preparation of the virtual meeting.

74. The Meeting adopted the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Senior Officials Meeting on 13 October 2020. 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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