

Background document for Renewed Commitments to North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation

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NEASPEC Secretariat

I. Background

Guided by the NEASPEC Framework in 1996, Vision Statement in 2000 and Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs), North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) has gradually evolved into a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism in terms of (a) membership covering all six subregional member States; (b) programmatic areas covering air pollution, biodiversity and nature conservation, marine protected areas, low carbon cities, and desertification and land degradation; (c) participating stakeholders including governments, local governments, research institutions and civil society organizations; (d) modalities of delivering the work from policy dialogues to field projects; and (e) interlinkages of the work between local, national, (sub)regional and global agendas. The five-year NEASPEC Strategic Plans further help NEASPEC better define mid-term goals, approaches and sectoral objectives.

Member States have underlined the value of a step-by-step and practical approach of NEASPEC that achieved the above-mentioned progress. However, it is time to pursue a leap forward in the work of NEASPEC to address mounting environmental challenges, particularly, those associated with climate change, and to support the collaboration of member governments and stakeholders for the transition towards low carbon and greener development pathways. Most NEASPEC member States require drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to meet national targets of carbon neutrality plan and/or updated Nationally Determined Contributions. Achieving rapid decarbonization necessitates the full and best utilization of policy tools, finance, low-carbon technology and innovations from domestic and international sources in order to make timely and cost-effective responses. Decarbonization also requires a holistic approach to designing socioeconomic policies and infrastructure with consideration of a longer time horizon and multisectoral impact to avoid and minimize possible carbon lock-in effects on society over the next decades.

To accelerate achieving the common goals, governments and stakeholders across the member States need to cooperate to make the best use of the limited time and resources in analyzing environmental challenges of common interests and developing new knowledge, know-how,

technology and policies. As such, a cooperative approach to developing and implementing policies is critical and subregional cooperation is a key building block for the approach. In this connection, NEASPEC as the comprehensive mechanism could expand its function to be a platform for dialogues and technical cooperation on decarbonization.

Meanwhile, the independent evaluation of NEASPEC conducted in 2020 recommended reviewing the NEASPEC Framework to enable the full realization of its founding vision to be a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism and updating NEASPEC's long-term vision, mission and goals to align NEASPEC with the ambition and intention of the member States. The SOM-24 in October 2020 reviewed the recommendations and secretariat response to the evaluation and decided to hold a National Focal Points (NFP) meeting to develop and agree on a concrete implementation plan for addressing the evaluation recommendations with clear responsibilities and timelines. The NFP Meeting held in May 2021 generally agreed to develop a renewed commitment document while its necessity would be further reviewed and decided at the SOM-25, or in connection with a mid-term review of NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025. The SOM-25 requested the secretariat to prepare a draft for the member States' review and revisions through NFP meetings and to submit for consideration and adoption at SOM-26 in 2023.

In view of the above considerations, the secretariat developed a draft document to help the member States conceptualize renewed commitments to NEASPEC for review and revisions prior to the SOM-26.

II. Context

The world is faced with multi-dimensional and alarming global crises, driven dominated by economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, conflicts, and food crises of unprecedented hunger. These crises have severely impacted the environment, livelihood and health, education and security. As evidenced in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Report 2022, global progress on different goals remains uneven, slow or even regressing, making the world off-the-track to secure an inclusive, low-carbon and sustainable future. These situations call for urgent, concrete and innovative global, regional and national actions and solutions in a cooperative and holistic manner. In this connection, international, regional and intergovernmental cooperation and processes continue to enhance their efforts to deliver global sustainability. With high relevance to provide an overarching landscape to guide NEASPEC's existing and potential priority areas of environmental issues, key milestones worth noting to advance environmental cooperation and actions included in, but not limited to, the following at global and regional developments.

Global and regional context:

- Accelerated actions for the implementation of the 2030 agenda and SDGs, including enhanced international awareness and cooperation for SDGs and country initiatives such as the Global Development Initiative (GDI)
- Enhanced commitments to environmental action, including through the Stockholm+50
- Increased understanding and commitment to the decarbonization of the economy, enhanced goals and actions on climate change, and strengthened integration of climate action and biodiversity conservation through elaborating nature-based solutions during the recent developments, including the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan from recent Conference of the Parties (COPs) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted at COP 15 to the United Nations Convention of Biological Diversity
- Enhanced scope and level of regional cooperation on environmental cooperation, such as on air pollution and ocean, as elaborated in the Ministerial Declaration on Protecting Our Planet through Regional Cooperation and Solidarity in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme on Air Pollution
- Increased commitments of the member States to global goals and targets, recognizing emerging environmental challenges and current progress in subregional and multilateral environmental cooperation