North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) Workshop 2024 on Advancing Marine Protected Areas for Climate Action, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development

Qingdao, China
11-12 November 2024

REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP

1. The NEASPEC Secretariat, in collaboration with the First Institute of Oceanography (FIO) and the China-PEMSEA Sustainable Coastal Management Cooperation Center (CPC), convened the North-East Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) Workshop on *Advancing Marine Protected Areas for Climate Action, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development* from 11 to 12 November 2024 in Qingdao, China. The workshop brought together approximately 70 participants, including NEAMPAN Steering Committee members, NEAMPAN site managers, researchers, representatives of civil society and international and non-governmental organizations.

2. The workshop commenced with opening remarks by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, Deputy Head of the ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office (ESCAP ENEA). He provided an overview of the workshop's objectives, emphasizing its role in uniting a diverse array of stakeholders to review ongoing regional, national and local initiatives addressing the climate crisis in marine protected areas (MPAs). He outlined the workshop's aim to discuss actional strategies for enhancing MPA effectiveness and to reinforce NEAMPAN's role in promoting ocean-based climate solutions.

3. Following the opening remarks, welcoming and congratulatory remarks were delivered by Mr. Zhang Zhaohui, Research Professor at FIO and Deputy Director of CPC, and Ms. Lu He, Director of the Department of Natural Protected Area Management, National Forestry and Grassland Administration of China, respectively. Both speakers underscored the critical role of MPAs in safeguarding marine ecosystems and mitigating climate change. They highlighted the importance of enhanced cooperation among MPAs to create synergies in addressing emerging challenges. In particular, Ms. Lu He reaffirmed the National Forestry and Grassland Administration's commitment to supporting NEAMPAN's growth. She outlined plans for continued collaboration among

its 12 member sites through workshops, site visits and capacity-building initiatives aimed at strengthening MPA policies, management and sustainable development.

4. The opening session concluded with a keynote speech by Mr. Joseph Appiott, Programme Management Officer for Marine and Coastal Biodiversity at the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Mr. Appiott highlighted the significance of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF), with a particular focus on Target 3. This target calls for the effective conservation and management of at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine areas by 2030, through ecologically representative, well-connected, and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs). He stressed that while expanding coverage is crucial, the primary challenge lies in ensuring the effectiveness of conservation efforts. He called for comprehensive implementation strategies and equitable governance structures to achieve lasting outcomes in biodiversity conservation.

[Session 1] Marine protected areas in the climate crisis: National policy responses

5. The first session, moderated by Ms. Jeniffer George, Chief Executive of East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), commenced with a warm welcome and expressions of gratitude to the participants. Ms. George underscored the critical importance of international collaboration in addressing the climate crisis. She outlined the session's agenda, which included presentations and discussions on the challenges, opportunities, and forward-looking solutions related to MPAs. She also highlighted the role of NEAMPAN in advancing regional MPA strategies.

6. Following an overview of NEAMPAN by Ms. Mi-Jin Lee, Research Associate at the ESCAP ENEA, Mr. Zhang Zhaohui presented China's national policy responses. He detailed China's MPA policy framework, highlighting recent institutional reforms. He noted the establishment of a new MPA authority under the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, with inspection responsibilities assigned to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment and law enforcement by the coast guard. Since these reforms, China's MPA network was expanded from 271 to 352 sites, reducing overlapping areas. Key legislative frameworks include the Wetland Protection Law, Wildlife Protection Law and Marine Environmental Protection Law, with ongoing revision under the National People's Congress. He emphasized China's 2020 pledge to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 and the 2022 National Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, which prioritizes coastal restoration for biodiversity conservation. Despite progress, Mr. Zhang acknowledged the limited integration of climate-specific measures in MPA policies and

called for enhanced regional collaboration, expansion of NEAMPAN sites, and collective efforts to increase marine conservation coverage.

7. Mr. Kichise Satoshi, Assistant Director of the Biodiversity Policy Division, Nature Conservation Bureau, Ministry of the Environment of Japan, presented Japan's national policy responses. He provided an overview of Japan's MPA system, which encompasses national parks and conservation areas under the Fisheries Act, protecting 13.3% of marine areas. However, he noted that only 8% of these MPAs cover offshore regions, and management is fragmented across multiple systems. National policies have had limited influence on local MPA management plans. Japan faces challenges in meeting its 30x30 target, with 8% of offshore seabed areas and 19% of offshore surface areas currently under protection. Mr. Satoshi proposed a focus on designating 18% of Japan's ocean areas as MPAs and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) to meet these targets.

8. Ms. So Hyun Park, Assistant Manager of the Marine Protected Area Management Department at the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation (KOEM), presented the national policy responses of the Republic of Korea (ROK) remotely. She explained that the MPA system in ROK is divided into four categories governed by two primary laws, emphasizing that current MPA coverage remains at only 1.8% although the 30x30 target is a national priority. She noted that MPA administration is shared between the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries (MOF) and KOEM, with local governments managing specific projects in coordination with these entities. She highlighted that despite the recognized need for increased funding, the 2024 MPA budget has been significantly reduced, affecting project support. She stated that to address these challenges, ROK is advancing OECM initiatives and plans to designate large-scale MPAs, particularly in uninhabited islands, starting in December 2024. She concluded by affirming that efforts to promote ecotourism and raise public awareness about MPAs will continue in ROK.

9. Mr. Anatolii Kachur, International Project Manager at the Pacific Geographical Institute, Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, presented the Russian Federation's national policy responses. He described the impacts of climate change on MPAs in the Russian Federation, including invasive species, increased methane emissions in the norther regions, more frequent typhoons, and rising precipitation affecting water and coastal ecosystems. He explained that the Climate Doctrine of the Russian Federation outlines priorities for climate mitigation, adaptation, and ecosystem monitoring. He noted that Russia's MPAs span over 3 million hectares, with a particular

focus on monitoring the northern territories. He highlighted the integration of additional reserved into NEAMPAN. He reaffirmed Russia's commitment to ongoing efforts in marine ecosystem monitoring and management.

10. The Q&A session provided further insights into the national approaches of the subregion toward managing and expanding their MPAs. China emphasized its ongoing efforts to implement a coastal spatial planning for each province, with plans to develop a comprehensive national MPA strategy to streamline management and enhance conservation outcomes. Japan highlighted the role of marine spatial planning (MSP) under the Cabinet Office, acknowledging limited progress in formalizing MSP but noting inter-ministerial collaboration on projects assessing the environmental impacts of marine development activities, such as offshore wind power and Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS). These discussions underscored the shared challenges and varied strategies in the region's collective pursuit of the 30x30 conservation target.

[Session 2] Managing marine protected areas in the climate crisis: Challenges, best practices and solutions

11. Moderated by Mr. Zhang Zhaohui, Session 2 focused on the pivotal role of MPAs in mitigating climate impacts and enhancing ecosystem resilience. The session brought together diverse perspectives and practical insights from speakers who examined challenges, highlighted successful practices, and discussed innovative solutions to strengthen the role of MPAs in addressing the climate crisis.

12. Mr. Chongliang Zhang, Associate Professor at the Fishery College, Ocean University of China, presented on "*Marine Conservation Strategies from an Ecological-Economic-Social Dynamic Perspective*." He began by discussing the research background, highlighting the global recognition of declining marine natural resources and the increasing promotion of MPAs as a crucial tool for conserving marine biodiversity and supporting fisheries management. He emphasized the importance of developing MPAs with multiple objectives. His approach highlighted the need to incorporate biological dynamics – such as protecting critical habitats, species and ecological functions, and enhancing fish populations and spillover effects - while minimizing socio-economic costs. He stressed that evaluating these socio-economic costs through a dynamic framework is essential to devising cost-effective conservation strategies, ensuring balanced and sustainable outcomes.

13. Mr. Kyong O Moon, Technical Advisor for the World Heritage Committee (Delegation of the Republic of Korea), spoke on "*Expanding Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)*

through World Heritage: The Case of Getbol, Korean Tidal Flats." He underscored the importance of including more MPAs on the World Heritage List for balanced global representation. He also detailed the process of MPA expansion through the World Heritage Nomination Process, drawing comparisons between the Wadden Sea and the Yellow Sea. He proposed strategies such as leveraging UNESCO branding to project the Yellow Sea MPA Belt, transitioning it into national-level MPAs, and enhancing NEAMPAN's role in fostering cooperation, participation and knowledge sharing.

14. Mr. Joonsun Kim, Chairman of the Committee for World Heritage Preservation in Suncheon City, Republic of Korea, presented a practical case study on "*Conservation and Management of 'Getbol' World Heritage Sites in Suncheon Bay*." He introduced Suncheon as a premier eco-tourism destination, renowned for its migratory bird populations, particularly hooded cranes, which attract significant numbers of tourists. He outlined the Master Plan for conserving Suncheon Bay, explaining the concepts of green carbon and blue carbon in wetland conservation. He concluded by emphasizing NEAMPAN's value as a platform for enhanced cooperation.

15. Mr. Ivan Rakov, Head of PR department, Land of the Leopard National Park, presented "*Far Eastern Marine Biosphere Reserve (FEMBR).*" He described the reserve's diverse marine and terrestrial ecosystems, which host a variety of sea, island and coastal species. He identified three primary threats to FEMBR: the climate crisis, pollutants from the Tuman River and the warm Tsushima Current, and poaching of sea cucumbers. He proposed strengthening transboundary cooperation, including joint monitoring of the Tumen River and collaborative measures with China, citing successful examples such as anti-smuggling efforts for tiger parts.

16. Mr. Hongfei Zhuang, Associate Professor at the First Institute of Oceanography, Ministry of Natural Resources, presented "*Survival and Protection of the Spotted Seal (Phoca largha) in the Yellow Sea Ecoregion*." He provided an overview of the spatial and temporal patterns of the spotted seal and analyzed threats from both natural and human-induced factors. He highlighted China's legislative progress and the establishment of MPAs for spotted seal conservation and discussed ongoing initiatives aimed at their protection.

17. Ms. Xiaoyan Wang, Associate Professor at the Fishery College, Ocean University of Zhejiang, presented her research on the "*Comprehensive Application of Environmental DNA (eDNA) for Species Monitoring and Protection*." She began with an overview of biodiversity monitoring and introduced operational standards for eDNA technology. She shared case studies involving species such as the large yellow croaker, red drum, Chinese

sturgeon and ecosystems in the East China Sea. She concluded with recommendations for future cooperation for species monitoring and conservation using multiple technologies.

18. The discussion explored various critical topics. Speakers elaborated on China's blue carbon initiatives, highlighting efforts to standardize carbon storage assessments in ecosystems such as mangroves, seagrass and mudflats. They emphasized the importance of international cooperation in advancing MPA strategies across the Yellow Sea. The role of eDNA as a non-invasive and cost-effective tool for species detection was also discussed, noting that it is particularly useful for presence detection but less so far detailed population monitoring. Participants also examined challenges in expanding MPAs, noting that strong local and national backing can drive expansion initiatives. The session concluded with an emphasis on local community engagement and collaboration among North-East Asian countries to overcome geopolitical obstacles and achieve more effective, cooperation conservation outcomes in the subregion.

[Session 3] Aligning NEAMPAN with global and regional frameworks for Ocean-Based Climate Action

19. Moderated by Mr. Riccardo Mesiano, the session emphasized the urgent need for international collaboration to tackle the climate crisis, exploring efforts at the global, regional and national levels.

20. Mr. Jungho Nam, Senior Research Fellow, Korea Maritime Institute, highlighted the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss, emphasizing MPAs as vital tools for building resilience. He noted that while 8.16% of the world's oceans are protected, more proactive efforts are needed to meet the 30x30 target. Citing recent studies, he pointed out that only 20.9% of 1,609 MPAs globally have detailed climate change action plans, underscoring the need to integrate nature-based solutions and ocean-based climate action at the implementation level. He also stressed addressing 'paper parks', strengthening MPA networks, and enhancing management effectiveness, highlighting stakeholder participation and strong legislation as key success factors.

21. Ms. Hitomi Rankine, Chief of Section, Environmental Affairs Office, ESCAP, underscored the urgency of ocean conservation and emphasized ESCAP's Ocean-Based Climate Action (OBCA) initiative as a key framework for addressing climate challenges. She highlighted ESCAP's role in fostering regional cooperation through partnerships with FAO, UNESCO, UNEP and UNDP. She detailed initiatives under OBCA, including

blue carbon ecosystems, decarbonizing maritime connectivity, and enhancing ocean climate resilience, all of which contribute to strengthening MPA networks. She urged ESCAP member States to actively engage in OBCA and collaboration on innovative solutions to advance regional conservation goal.

22. Mr. Zhao Linlin from FIO addressed challenges such as rising sea temperatures, ocean acidification, and species distribution shifts in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea, and South China Se. He highlighted China's climate initiatives, including the carbon peaking and neutrality goals, and emphasized integrating climate considerations into MPA planning to ensure their effectiveness.

23. Mr. Mahesh Pradhan, Coordinator of the Coordinating Body on the Seas of East Asia (COBSEA), outlined COBSEA's strategic approach, focusing on the triple planetary crises and partnerships across six major marine ecosystems. He also highlighted the role of MPAs in promoting coastal resilience, blue carbon and spatial planning.

24. Ms. Jennifer George, Chief Executive, East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) emphasized the critical role of MPAs in protecting seabird habitats across 19 countries with Flyway Network Sites. She highlighted the importance of data-sharing and international cooperation in enhancing conservation efforts. Addressing challenges such as underfunding, governance gaps, insufficient protection levels, and difficulties in integrating local communities and stakeholders in management processes which limit their overall effectiveness, she called for strengthening partnerships with experts and non-government organizations, establishing large MPAs, and reducing plastic pollutions to improve the overall effectiveness of MPAs.

25. Ms. Puri Canals, Coordinator for the Global Network of MPA Manager Networks, highlighted strategies for knowledge-sharing, capacity building and policy support. Introducing the global network of MPA managers, she emphasized its potential to contribute to achieving the 30x30 target. She also stressed the importance of fostering successful partnerships to deliver tangible conservation outcomes on the ground.

26. Ms. Rebecca Reinecke, Project Manager DPRK, Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea, highlighted the growing interest of DPRK in MPAs despite challenges such as military control and limited data. She noted DPRK's participation in international initiatives, including the Ramsar Convention, IUCN and EAAFP, and underscored the importance of sustained international collaboration to support and advance DPRK's marine conservation efforts.

27. The Q&A session provided a platform for participants to delve deeper into the challenges and opportunities related to MPA governance, regional cooperation and stakeholder engagement. Key discussions emphasized the importance of effective enforcement and management over the sheer number of MPAs, with participants acknowledging that strong governance frameworks are critical to achieving conservation goals. The role of ecosystem services in framing the value of MPAs was highlighted as a strategy for attracting investment and fostering intersectoral advocacy. Practical examples of successful initiatives, such as harmonized monitoring guidelines for marine plastics and ghost gear management with ROK, illustrated the benefits of transboundary cooperation.

28. Participants also explored strategies for expanding partnerships and secure funding including opportunities provided by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), emphasizing the need for collaboration with global networks and leveraging shared knowledge platforms. Engaging the private sector was identified as an area of potential growth, with financial incentives and shared value discussions serving as key drivers. The session concluded with reflections on the unique challenges faced by DPRK, underscoring the importance of sustained international dialogue and innovative approaches to fostering regional collaboration.

[MPA Talk]

29. The MPA Talk held on the morning of 12 November 2024 served as a follow-up to the first session conducted virtually on 28 March 2024. This meeting focused on assessing NEAMPAN's activities over the past four years (2021–2024), identifying gaps, and strategizing for 2025 and the next phase of the NEASPEC five-year plan (2026–2030). Participants reviewed the network's achievements and challenges, discussing actionable steps to enhance its impact and align with global biodiversity and conservation goals.

30. Participants recognized NEAMPAN's progress in facilitating dialogue and knowledge exchange, especially through virtual events during the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts fostered communication and learning among member states despite restrictions on in-person interactions. However, the network struggled to implement concrete collaborative projects. Administrative changes in member states and limited opportunities for in-person engagement further slowed progress. Participants emphasized the need for more measurable outcomes and tangible initiatives to solidify NEAMPAN's role in regional marine conservation.

31. The discussion highlighted several incomplete activities from the NEASPEC strategic plan for 2021–2025. Key areas of concern included transboundary cooperation in species conservation, particularly for spotted seals and East Asian finless porpoises. To address these gaps, participants proposed developing MPA effectiveness evaluation reports and formalizing agreements for the protection of migratory marine mammal species. These initiatives would strengthen the network's capacity to tackle shared challenges and align its efforts with the Global Biodiversity Framework and other international conservation targets.

32. Looking ahead, participants identified the need to strengthen partnerships and raise NEAMPAN's profile on regional and global platforms. Expanding the network to include research institutions, NGOs, and private sector stakeholders in advisory roles was proposed to diversify expertise and broaden support. Active participation in major international conferences, such as the Our Ocean Conference and the UN Ocean Conference, was seen as critical for establishing NEAMPAN as a key player in marine conservation.

33. Efforts to improve data sharing and transparency were also discussed, with a proposal to develop a regional directory of MPAs. This directory would begin as a basic listing of sites, locations, and contacts, serving as a foundation for more comprehensive data integration in the future. Enhanced data-sharing mechanisms would support regional cooperation and help track the network's progress toward conservation goals.

34. Capacity building was another focal point of the meeting. Participants emphasized the importance of targeted workshops and expert meetings to equip MPA managers, policymakers, and researchers with the tools and knowledge needed for effective conservation. Priority topics included marine mammal conservation and the application of innovative monitoring technologies, such as environmental DNA (eDNA). Additionally, a public awareness initiative such as NEAMPAN Awards was suggested as a way to recognize best practices and incentivize greater participation.

35. Given the complex political landscape, participants also explored strategies for engaging with the DPRK and the Russian Federation. Despite current tensions, bilateral meetings, particularly with China as an intermediary, were identified as potential avenues for maintaining dialogue and advancing joint initiatives. These efforts aim to ensure that all member states remain engaged in NEAMPAN's activities.

36. Participants reflected on the structure and frequency of NEAMPAN meetings. While the current number of meetings was considered sufficient, a more focused and thematic approach was recommended to enhance productivity. Smaller, specialized meetings could delve deeper into specific topics, while an annual NEAMPAN Awareness Day could help showcase the network's achievements and attract new stakeholders.

37. The MPA Talk series will continue next year, providing a platform to refine NEAMPAN's strategic direction. Insights from these discussions will inform the development of the NEASPEC Strategic Plan for 2026–2030, ensuring that NEAMPAN remains a dynamic and responsive network capable of addressing the region's evolving conservation challenges.