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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Strengthening Subregional Cooperation on Marine Environment

Note by the Secretariat

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Annex: Subregional Cooperation for Strengthening Marine Protected Areas in North-East Asia

I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

1. At the 16th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-16) held in September 2011 in Seoul, the Government of Republic of Korea presented a project proposal on “Strengthening Subregional Cooperation to Address Environmental Challenges related to Transboundary Marine Pollution”, which recommended a new framework of cooperation in the subregion to address challenges in protecting marine environment. This new framework would entail the sharing of information and knowledge on issues and policies regarding transboundary marine pollution.

2. An Expert Consultation Meeting (ECM) was organized on 27-28 June 2012 in Seoul in accordance with the decision of the SOM-16 that supported the proposal of convening an ECM to further elaborate the proposal for the decision of SOM-17. The meeting was attended by sixteen participants including national experts nominated by the governments of China, Japan, Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation and resource persons from the intergovernmental organizations and programmes including the Partnerships in Environmental Management for the Seas of East Asia (PEMSEA), and UN bodies including Northwest of Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) of UNEP and UNDP/GEF Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem Project (YSLME).

3. The ECM facilitated exchange of views and ideas among national experts and other involved stakeholders on the scope of the project, modality of its implementation and required partnerships with relevant organizations working in the field of transboundary marine pollution in North-East Asia.

4. In particular, participants discussed and exchanged ideas and views on existing gaps in multilateral cooperation in North-East Asia and identified the following possible areas for joint subregional activities within the framework of NEASPEC:

- Marine litter
- Marine Protected Areas (MPA)
- Influence of chemicals
- Ecosystem assessment
- Climate change

5. Considering existing programmes, scientific capacity and subregional needs for each topic, it was generally perceived that the facilitation of cooperation among MPAs could be the main focus of NEASPEC.

6. Following the ECM, the Secretariat conducted research on the situations of MPAs in the subregion as well as potentials of establishing a MPA network. Key points of the research are presented as follows:

7. MPAs can be defined as “any area of intertidal or subtidal terrain, together with its overlying water and associated flora, fauna, historical and cultural features, which has been reserved by law or other effective means to protect part or all of the enclosed environment”.¹

8. MPAs are beneficial to both environment and economy. MPAs increase biodiversity, supporting the protection of species and ecosystems as well as the preservation of habitats and preventing outside activities from harming the ecosystem. Economically, MPAs stabilize fish populations in aggregated catch levels, providing a platform for job creation for instance through non-consumptive measures such as tourism.

9. In North-East Asia, a variety of MPAs can be identified. Considering only those MPAs that are located at the national level and administered by the national government, in China as of 2011 there were 33 Marine Nature Reserves and 21 Marine Special Protected Areas; in Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, 3 out of 81 natural parks and 10 out of total 74 reserves for protection of plant, animals or migratory birds have a character of marine protected areas; in Japan, 91 Marine Park Zones in National and Quasi-National Parks as well as 1 Marine Nature Conservation Area exist; in the Republic of Korea, there were 16 MPAs in 2011 of which 12 were Wetland Reserves and 4 were Marine Ecological Reserves; and the Russian Federation in 2011 had 35 national Marine and Coastal Protected Areas.

10. The MPAs in North-East Asia show, however, some severe limitations: (a) they all have a very short history of existence, most of them having been designed only within the last decade. In general, the protection of ecosystems and designated areas in North-East Asia is mostly concentrated in terrestrial but not marine areas, making MPAs a relatively new concept in the region; (b) another problem derives from the fact that the definition of MPAs differs concerning characteristics, purposes and regulations. Comparing the MPAs in the subregion, one can find examples of no-take marine nature reserves, national parks, wildlife reserves, wetland reserves, ecosystem reserves or habitat reserves. Along with this, there are also institutional differences in the management structure of the MPAs; (c) furthermore, statistical problems have surfaced concerning the actual amount of MPAs in the subregion. In comparison, national statistics tend to vary immensely from those conducted by international organizations and research institutes; (d) lastly, while there have been some attempts on the creation of national MPA networks, these remain limited due to the borderless character of the marine environment per se. International cooperation remains small and is focused only on a few areas such as monitoring.

¹ UNEP-WCMC (2008), p. 17.

II. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NORTH-EAST ASIAN MARINE PROTECTED AREAS NETWORK

11. Considering the transboundary character of marine ecosystems, it is proposed to establish the North-East Asian MPAs Network as the most effective way to further improve the management of various MPAs in the subregion. Benefits of such a network are manifold. Not only can it help protect biodiversity in marine and coastal areas more efficiently, it can also bring along sharing of information and experiences , collective training in various aspects and common guidelines for a more effective management.

12. Research on the global status of MPA networks shows various benefits of the regional networks for the conservation of biodiversity, a common and improved management of the areas, information and technology sharing, capacity building, efficient use of resources, as well as dialogue between stakeholders. A variety of international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity as well as the outcome document of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 20-22 June 2012 support the creation of MPA networks.

13. Possible activity areas for the North-East Asian MPAs Network under NEASPEC may include, among others, the following:

- Bringing together the relevant stakeholders in the MPA management authorities, the decision-makers in the respective government as well as research institutions and civil society organizations.
- Acting as a key subregional platform for information sharing. In other regions, many of the existing MPA networks have utilized information provided by the participating countries or MPA managements in a database accessible not only to the members of the network but the general public as well. The information could also be utilized to develop a regional guide.
- Contributing to the management of prevailing differences in the institutional setting of existing MPAs in the subregion. The existing discrepancy in management capacities between different sites and countries can also be improved via a MPA network as its establishment may lead to sharing approaches and techniques among all stakeholders involved.
- Providing a platform for joint assessment and monitoring of the structure and work of different MPAs as well as a multilateral policy dialogue on more efficient management of MPAs. In practice, this could include regular intergovernmental meetings, joint research projects and equally important management trainings.
- Establishing links to and partnership with other regional and global programmes concerning biodiversity conservation and the protection of marine areas. Cooperation with existing programmes especially those related to the protection of wetlands and

migratory birds in the subregion could complement each other and be beneficial to the marine areas in North-East Asia.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

14. The Meeting may wish to decide on the establishment of North-East Asian MPAs Network to promote cooperation among different MPAs.

15. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to nominate national institutions to act as the focal points for the development and operation of the Network.

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