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**REVIEW OF ISSUES CONCERNING THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT OF
NEASPEC**

(Item 7 of the provisional agenda)

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Further to decisions from the 15th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-15); and the 66th and 67th ESCAP Commission Sessions, the interim nature of the NEASPEC Secretariat was discontinued and ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEA) has been designated to serve as the permanent secretariat of NEASPEC.

2. As documented in NEASPEC/SOM(16)/7, with increasing support of member States to programme and financial resources, coupled with the strengthening of human resources from SRO-ENEA, there has been a considerable expansion of NEASPEC activities during the recent years. Moving forward, NEASPEC/SOM(16)/7 provides some historical background of NEASPEC in a number of institutional arrangement matters as well as identifying several issues for consideration by member States.

3. These matters include (i) further strengthening of human resources including but not limited to secondment of national experts; (ii) scaling up the financial contributions of member States; (iii) addressing the need for the chairmanship during interregnum periods of SOMs as well as rules of procedure; (iv) clarifying the modality of communication between the Secretariat, member States and national focal points; and (v) clarifying the official status of the Secretariat staff.

4. During SOM-16, it was decided that the Chair of the then SOM to continue his/her functions until the next SOM in order to enhance effective communication between member States. The meeting also noted the need to clarify a number of these matters and therefore requested the Secretariat to carry out an analytical study of similar subregional programmes and entities with a view of benefitting from their experience as member States wish to deepen and broaden NEASPEC's engagement.

II. REVIEW OF SOM-17 DISCUSSION ON THE OUTCOMES OF AN ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT

5. Based on the decision of SOM-16, an analytical study, "North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation: Challenges and Opportunities" was carried out by an external consultant. The study reviewed existing subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms in Asia and the Pacific; in particular, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) and the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), as well as the existing subregional environmental frameworks and programmes in North-East Asia. i.e., Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI), North West Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP), North-East Asian Forest Forum (NEAFF), East Asian Biosphere Reserve Network (EABRN),

Tripartite Environment Ministers' Meeting (TEMM), Joint Research Project on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollutants (LTP), and Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET).

6. Based on this review and drawing from the practices of these mechanisms, frameworks and programmes, the study suggested that, with the permanent status of the NEASPEC Secretariat and its expanding programmes and other activities, including an increase in communications and interactions with the member States and other multilateral agencies and national stakeholders, there is a need to strengthen the Secretariat's human and technical capacity with adequate and predictable financial resources.

7. Some of the key recommendations, which are the views of the external consultant and do not necessarily represent those of the Secretariat staff, are listed below:

- (a) member States to consider strengthening the political commitment to upgrading SOM to the ministerial level and raising the level of delegates from the environment and/or development ministries for the SOM or ministerial level meetings;
- (b) member States to consider strengthening the human and technical capacity of the Secretariat through secondment of national experts or through Junior Professional Officers programme;
- (c) member States to consider strengthening the financial mechanisms by moving away from the present voluntary contributions to a more stable and regular mechanism in financing;
- (d) member States to consider according official status to staff members who are serving NEASPEC, including the Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator (if any) and Secretariat assistant, so as to facilitate their communication with member States and external agencies;
- (e) member States to consider maximizing NEASPEC's comparative advantage to catalyse and build partnerships with existing subregional environmental cooperation mechanisms, frameworks and programmes, and expanding the activities of NEASPEC; and
- (f) member States to consider adopting a Five-Year (2013-2017) or Ten-Year (2013-2022) NEASPEC Strategic Action Plan to provide a roadmap for NEASPEC's future activities.

8. The SOM-17 commended the efforts made by the Secretariat in producing a comprehensive review of relevant subregional mechanisms and recommendations for further strengthening NEASPEC. There was general consensus on the need for strengthening the human, technical and financial capacity of NEASPEC Secretariat and expanding its partnership with other relevant mechanisms and programmes. In particular,

the Meeting came to a general conclusion on the continuation of the current arrangement of the governing body, i.e. SOM, while ad hoc ministerial gatherings could be organized, taking advantage of regional ministerial meetings including Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific.

9. The Meeting also took note of the recommendations on the need of according official status to staff members of ESCAP SRO-ENEA serving NEASPEC in order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Secretariat work, and also on the need of developing a long-term (five year or ten year) strategy as a way to support member States to share a long-term view on the direction of NEASPEC and to enhance the efficiency of NEASPEC. Such strategy could be prepared and presented to an ad hoc ministerial gathering in the occasion of the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific to be held in 2015.

10. In this regard, the Secretariat views that SOM-18 may need to revisit the recommendations and in particular those matters that were positively noted by the Meeting, and make the final decision.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

11. The Meeting may wish to make the final decision on recommendations and in particular those contained in the paragraph 9.

12. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to express their views on any other matters pertaining to the institutional arrangement and/or intended contributions to strengthening the arrangement.

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