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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Twenty-fifth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC

20-21 September 2022

Virtual meeting

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

1. The Twenty-fifth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) was held on 20-21 September 2022 and virtually hosted by Japan. 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 Japan.

I. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Meeting commended the Secretariat for their continued efforts in promoting subregional cooperation among member States and tackling pressing environmental issues in North-East Asia, in particular during the Covid-19 pandemic period. Recognizing global and regional agreements and initiatives on air pollution, biodiversity and climate change, the Meeting reiterated the importance of multilateral collaboration for environmental sustainability through NEASPEC. The Meeting reaffirmed the support of member States towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, creating synergies among multi-stakeholders and relevant mechanisms.

3. **Air Pollution:** The Meeting noted the work progress in 2021 and 2022 on air pollution in line with the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) Work Plan 2021-2025. The Meeting noted the reports of the third and fourth virtual meetings of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee (SPC) held on 30 April 2021 and 30 June 2022, respectively. The Meeting was informed of the progress made on the preparation of the policy analysis report and the review paper on the Best Available Techniques. The Meeting adopted the proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedures of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee on the rotation of the SPC chairpersonship. The Meeting also requested the member States to finalize the nomination of national experts to work on the NEACAP policy analysis report and requested the SPC-5 to discuss potential priority areas of Category II activities.

4. Highlighting the importance of addressing air pollution in North-East Asia, the member States supported the idea of NEASPEC's collaboration with Tripartite Policy Dialogue on Air Pollution (TPDAP) and other similar platforms and welcomed further discussions with relevant member States on collaboration modalities. With its support to further operationalizing the NEACAP Work Plan, the Meeting adopted the proposed activity plan for the remaining 2022 and 2023.
5. **Biodiversity and Nature Conservation:** The Meeting stressed the need to strengthen partnerships among member States on transboundary biodiversity and nature conservation. The Meeting was informed of the progress of the NEASPEC project on the transboundary cooperation on the conservation of the Amur tiger, Amur leopard and Snow leopard in North-East Asia and the relevant bilateral and multilateral cooperation by member States.
6. The Meeting also noted the progress in promoting subregional cooperation among protected wetlands in the Tumen River Estuary and requested for NEASPEC Secretariat to work closely with East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat and Greater Tumen Initiative Secretariat. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan for the remaining 2022 and 2023 on biodiversity and nature conservation. The Meeting welcomed the offer by the Republic of Korea to host a workshop on nature conservation and biodiversity for transboundary cooperation in the fourth quarter of 2023.
7. **Marine Protected Areas:** The Meeting was informed of the outcomes of the third and fourth Steering Committee Meetings of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) held virtually on 23 April 2021 and 20 July 2022, respectively. To further promote and strengthen knowledge sharing and partnerships, the Meeting recommended the expansion of NEAMPAN sites among member States. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan for the remaining 2022 and 2023 on marine protected areas.
8. **Low Carbon Cities:** The Meeting highlighted the significant role of cities in promoting the global agenda for sustainable development and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Meeting reaffirmed the relevance and value of the North-East Asia Low Carbon Cities Platform (NEA-LCCP), noting its broad engagement with diverse stakeholders, including cities, to discuss the way forward toward concrete climate actions. The Meeting commended the progress of the project on Leveraging Science, Technology and Innovative for Low Carbon and Resilient Cities and also commended the knowledge sharing among member States through the successful organization of the first International Forum on Low Carbon Cities (LCCF) in November 2021. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan for the remaining 2022 and 2023 on low carbon cities. The Meeting noted that the Secretariat clarified the compilation and compendium of best practices in the proposed activity plan is promotional material.
9. **Desertification and Land Degradation:** Noting the ongoing re-orientation of the work programme on desertification and land degradation (DLD) to create synergies with other similar platforms, the Meeting was informed of the progress of work on the stock-taking study on

interlinkages of climate change and DLD, and the assessment of desertification, land degradation and drought risks in North-East Asia. With the aim to develop a subregional approach with a concrete action plan to address DLD and climate change while avoiding duplications of efforts with other platforms, such as the Northeast Asia Network for Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought, the Meeting approved the proposed activity plan for the remaining 2022 and 2023 on DLD.

10. **Renewed commitments to NEASPEC:** The Meeting reaffirmed the critical role and value of NEASPEC in tackling pressing environmental issues in North-East Asia. The Meeting agreed to develop a document on renewed commitments to NEASPEC, reflecting significant changes in the global, regional and national landscape for environmental cooperation. The Meeting also highlighted the need for an open, inclusive, transparent and consensus-based consultation process among member States and therefore requested the Secretariat to prepare a draft for member States' review and revisions through national focal point meetings and to submit for the consideration of adoption at the 26th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-26) in 2023, which marks the 30th anniversary of NEASPEC. For the Secretariat to develop the first draft, the Meeting requested the member States to share national comments on the document, *Provisional Outline of the Statement/Declaration on Renewed Commitments to NEASPEC developed by the Secretariat in July 2021*, with the Secretariat by 31 October 2022.

11. **Core Fund:** The Meeting appreciated the financial contributions of member States to the Core Fund as well as the Project-based Fund. Noting the need for reallocating the budget due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Meeting approved the revised budget plan for the project period of 2021-2025 in accordance with the ESCAP procedure. The Meeting encouraged member States to provide continued financial and in-kind contributions for the implementation of NEASPEC programmes and activities.

12. **Plan for the Next SOM:** The Meeting welcomed the statement of the Republic of Korea to host the SOM-26 in celebration of the 30th anniversary of NEASPEC, noting that the venue, time and modality will be consulted with and communicated to member States and the Secretariat in due course. The Meeting noted the request from Japan to organize the SOM-26 in June 2023 or later.

13. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the host government and the Chair for the successful conduct of the Meeting despite the technical difficulties of the virtual meeting. The Chair expressed his appreciation to the Secretariat for its preparatory work for the SOM-25 and thanked delegations for their active and dedicated participation at the Meeting.

II. PROCEEDINGS OF THE TWENTY-FIFTH SENIOR OFFICIALS MEETING

A. Attendance

14. 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

15. The Senior Officials Meeting was opened by Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head of ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia. He welcomed all delegates of member States and representatives from partner organizations and expressed gratitude to the Government of Japan for hosting the meeting virtually. Noting the SOM-25 took place in the time of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, he highlighted the urgent need to reverse the regression of progress on climate action. He appreciated the commitments of member States to targeting carbon neutrality by 2050 or 2060 and reaffirmed the NEASPEC Secretariat's full support to assist the member States in tackling shared environmental challenges in North-East Asia. On the way towards the celebration of the 30th anniversary of NEASPEC in 2023, he also emphasized the need for strong and active engagement of member States and expected their renewed commitments to subregional environmental cooperation.

16. Mr. Yoshihiro Mizutani, Director for International Cooperation for Transition to Decarbonization and Sustainable Infrastructure, Global Environment Bureau, Ministry of the Environment of Japan, delivered the welcoming remarks on behalf of the host Government. He welcomed all delegates to the SOM-25 and expressed gratitude to the NEASPEC Secretariat for supporting the meeting. Noting the typhoons in 2022 that affected people's daily life in Japan, Mr. Mizutani expressed sympathy to people who suffered the same in North-East Asia. He highlighted the need for regional and global efforts to tackle common environmental issues. He recognized the importance of the five thematic areas of NEASPEC and encouraged member States to promote environmental cooperation through NEASPEC.

C. Election of officers

17. The Meeting elected the following officers:

Chair:	Mr. Mizutani Yoshihiro (Japan)
Vice-Chair:	Ms. Irina Fominykh (the Russian Federation)
Rapporteur:	Ms. Eunjeong Cho (the Republic of Korea)

D. Adoption of the agenda

1. Opening of the meeting
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) Air Pollution
 - b) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

- c) Marine Protected Areas
 - d) Low Carbon Cities
 - e) Desertification and Land Degradation
6. Renewed commitments to NEASPEC
 7. Review of the Core Fund and Project-based Fund
 8. Venue, date and provisional agenda of the Twenty-sixth SOM (SOM-26)
 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)

18. The representative of China recognized the ongoing global challenges in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as economic slowdown, food crisis, energy crisis and debt crisis. Against these challenges, China highlighted the importance of NEASPEC member States making good use of this intergovernmental platform to strengthen environmental cooperation and achieve SDGs in the region. China also reaffirmed its active engagement in, continued contributions to and strong support for NEASPEC, commensurate with its development level. In this regard, China raised three proposals: 1) upholding multilateralism and promoting the community of shared destiny for mankind to jointly foster an enabling environment for regional and international cooperation, 2) prioritizing development to accelerate efforts to resolve major challenges and achieve the 2030 agenda, and 3) promoting sustainable development in North-East Asia through the global environmental governance process.

19. Within this context, the representative of China advocated multilateral cooperation in a fair, inclusive and just manner with full consideration of common but differentiated responsibilities, abiding by international laws and order. He also highlighted the Global Development Initiative (GDI) launched by China to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He indicated that over 100 countries and international organizations, including two-thirds of NEASPEC member States, expressed their support for the Initiative. Noting 32 deliverables covering eight priority areas generated from the High-Level Dialogue on Global Development in 2021, China considered GDI a feasible pathway to realize the 2030 Agenda. He also introduced China's achievements over the past years for a green, low-carbon and circular economy through the energy transition, afforestation, environment protection and air pollution management. He stated that China's energy intensity per unit of GDP in 2020 was reduced by 48.4 per cent from the 2005 level, achieving the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) ahead of schedule. With the successful organization and outcomes of phase one of the Fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2021 (CBD COP15), China reaffirmed its strong support for phase two of CBD COP15 and advancing global cooperation on biodiversity conservation.

20. The representative of Japan introduced Japan's approach to achieving sustainable development. Headed by the Prime Minister of Japan and composed of all Ministers, the SDGs

Promotion Headquarters developed the “SDGs Implementation Guiding Principles” in December 2016 and “SDGs Action Plan 2022” in December 2021, defining key initiatives and measures against climate change, biodiversity conservation, environmental conservation and marine plastic pollution. Aligned with its long-term goal of achieving net zero by 2050, Japan aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 46 per cent in the fiscal year 2030 from its 2013 levels and will continue strenuous efforts in its challenge to meet the goal of cutting its emissions by 50 per cent. Japan also promoted the diffusion of low-carbon technologies internationally through the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM), and Japan has implemented over 200 JCM projects in 22 partner countries, including Mongolia.

21. In addition, the representative of Japan highlighted Japan’s growing concern about the impact of plastic pollution on the marine ecosystem and advocated the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision. He urged global actions to tackle the issue and informed the SOM-25 of the first meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including the marine environment, in November 2022, where Japan will bring the voices of the Asia-Pacific region. With regard to biodiversity conservation, Japan expected concrete agreements in phase two of CBD COP15 and highlighted the key components for the discussion of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, including “30by30”, “nature-based solutions”, “virtuous cycle between biodiversity and economic growth” and “Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle”.

22. The representative of Mongolia highlighted the need to rethink and redesign the development paradigm since the COVID-19 pandemic and introduced Mongolia’s active engagement with development partners to address environmental challenges in areas of air pollution, land degradation and desertification, climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity, protected area network expansion, and sustainable forest cooperation. For example, Mongolia announced its national pledge in 2021 to plant one billion trees by 2030 as leverage to promote agro-forestry and forest protection, livelihood, job creation, food supply, and mitigation of air pollution and climate change.

23. Mongolia also reaffirmed its strong support for global environmental frameworks. She informed Mongolia’s plan to host the seventeenth Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and contributions to the endorsement of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework. The representative invited NEASPEC member States to join the CBD COP15 side events organized by Mongolia on linear infrastructure, wildlife and long-term financing mechanism for biodiversity. Mongolia also emphasized its keen interest in air pollution and expected a strong and ambitious ministerial declaration and a regional action programme on air pollution from the seventh session of the Committee on Environment and Development (CED-7) to be held from 29 November to 1 December 2022. Noting Mongolia’s renewed bilateral environmental agreements and Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with several member States in the subregion, she reiterated the critical role of NEASPEC in advancing the subregional environmental agendas.

24. The representative of the Republic of Korea expressed gratitude to Japan for hosting the SOM-25 and to the NEASPEC Secretariat for its support to member States. He urged member States to take immediate actions for sustainable development, noting the daily impact caused by COVID-19,

climate change and frequent extreme weather events. He reiterated the strong commitment of the Republic of Korea to climate goals, enhancing its 2030 greenhouse gas reduction target, compared to the 2018 level, from 24.4 per cent to 40 per cent in December 2021, and legislating its 2050 carbon neutrality goal. He also highlighted the strong commitment to national action and regional cooperation in addressing transboundary air pollution. For example, it plans to share scientific data on air pollutants gathered from the geostationary satellite with 13 UNESCAP member States in Southeast Asia through the project of the Pan-Asia Partnership for Geospatial Air Pollution Information (PAPGAPi).

25. He further emphasized that NEASPEC was established in 1993 based on the Republic of Korea's initiative, and it is the only intergovernmental mechanism with the participation of all member States in North-East Asia. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of NEASPEC in 2023 and as a host of the SOM-26, the Republic of Korea reaffirmed its utmost efforts to develop further the institutional basis of NEASPEC, including renewed commitments to NEASPEC, and to ensure tangible outcomes in 2023 by cooperation among member States.

26. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed gratitude to the host government of Japan and the NEASPEC Secretariat. Noting the entangled challenges during the global economic recovery, she encouraged member States to actively and extensively participate in multilateral processes and global environmental governance to explore new approaches to low-carbon transition and sustainable development. The representative emphasized the critical role of member States in the implementation of the Paris Agreement in the region and recognized the value of addressing environmental challenges through other intergovernmental platforms, such as UNCCD and CBD. In particular, she highlighted the keen interest of the Russian Federation in addressing land degradation, biodiversity loss, integrated and sustainable water resources management, resource use efficiency, circular economy and marine conservation.

27. The Russian Federation indicated that afforestation is the most effective and priority measure to combat desertification for the Russian Federation, and the country created a specialized Center to Combat Desertification, noting that the issue is complex and associated with biodiversity and habitat loss. The Russian Federation also introduced multiple initiatives to prevent biodiversity loss, such as criminal liability for the online trade-in of valuable wild animals and aquatic bioresources and the Vladivostok Declaration on Tiger Conservation announced on 5 September 2022. In addition, the Russian Federation highlighted the importance of integrated and sustainable water resources management and related intergovernmental cooperation, recognizing that the Russian Federation has a significant number of transboundary rivers, lakes, seas and basins. Regarding the transition to a circular economy, the Russian Federation indicated that it had taken measures to formulate legislative frameworks, improve waste management and implement the national project of ecology to create a comfortable and safe environment for people. Regarding marine conservation, the Russian Federation introduced its efforts to reform environmental legislation at a national level to reduce plastics, including a forthcoming obligatory document on marine plastic and recognizing the timeliness of UNEA's resolution to end plastic pollution through an international legally binding agreement by 2024.

28. The representative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) acknowledged the critical role of NEASPEC in promoting subregional environmental cooperation and multilateral partnerships. He recognized the relevance, alignment and milestones of NEASPEC with other intergovernmental processes, including 1) the United Nations General Assembly's resolution recognizing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right, 2) an international legally-binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, through the intergovernmental negotiating committee agreed at the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) with the ambition of completing its work by 2024, 3) phase two of the CBD COP15 in November 2022, and 4) COP27 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in November 2022. He also highlighted the complementarity of NEASPEC and UNEP in North-East Asia in the following areas: 1) Acid Deposition Monitoring Network in East Asia (EANET), 2) Knowledge and information exchange in the Asia-Pacific region, 3) Northwest Pacific Action Plan (NOWPAP) on marine plastic pollution, 4) Asia Pacific Adaptation Network on climate adaptation, and 5) circular economy.

F. Presentations and discussions on substantive agenda items (Agenda items 5, 6 and 7)

29. The Meeting heard presentations from the Secretariat on agenda item 5: Review of programme planning and implementation, agenda item 6: Renewed commitments to NEASPEC, agenda item 7: Review of the Core Fund and Project-based 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) Air Pollution

30. The Meeting heard a brief introduction on work progress in 2021 and 2022 on air pollution, in line with the North-East Asia Clean Air Partnership (NEACAP) Work Plan 2021-2025. The Meeting noted the reports of the third and fourth virtual meetings of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee (SPC) held on 30 April 2021 and 30 June 2022, respectively. The Meeting was informed of the progress made on the preparation of the policy analysis report and the review paper on the Best Available Techniques. The Meeting also noted the proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedures of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee on the rotation of the SPC chairpersonship.

31. The representative of the Republic of Korea emphasized the importance of work related to air pollution and expressed gratitude to the SPC for their efforts in steering activities of Category I. She urged member States to complete the nomination of national experts and confirmed the submission of nominations by the Republic of Korea. She encouraged the SPC to expedite the discussion and advise on priority areas of Category II activities at the SPC-5 meeting in 2023. She also supported the collaboration between NEASPEC with relevant mechanisms to create synergies of activities and supported linking the work of NEACAP, including policy dialogues with the Tripartite Policy Dialogue on Air Pollution (TPDAP) among China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

32. The representative of Mongolia expressed great appreciation for SPC's work and stressed the importance of addressing air pollution. She highlighted the ongoing regional consultations on air pollution as a preparation for the forthcoming seventh session of the ESCAP Committee on Environment and Development (CED-7) at the ministerial level. She indicated that Mongolia would be interested in hosting subregional and regional meetings on air pollution in 2023, should the outcomes of CED-7 be ambitious and strong. In addition, she supported renewing commitments to NEASPEC considering the significant updates of global environment frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement, Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and UNCCD. She also encouraged member States' support in developing a document of renewed commitments, especially considering it will be the 30th anniversary of NEASPEC in 2023.

33. The representative of China expressed appreciation to the Secretariat and SPC for their work, recognizing its alignment with the NEACAP Work Plan 2021-2025. He confirmed its later submission of nominations for national experts to conduct the policy analysis, noting the ongoing internal procedures. He supported the idea for the NEACAP to collaborate with relevant mechanisms, including linking the policy dialogues of NEACAP with TPDAP and requested the Secretariat's clarifications on specific modalities for such collaboration. He also agreed with the amendments to the Rules of Procedures of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee on the rotation of the SPC chairpersonship and the proposed activity plan for 2022 to 2023.

34. The representative of Japan indicated nominations for national experts are still under internal procedures. He also requested the Secretariat's clarifications on how to present authors on the final policy analysis report and the expected outcomes for collaborating with TPDAP. Japan agreed with the amendments to the Rules of Procedures of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee on the rotation of the SPC chairpersonship and the proposed activity plan for 2022 to 2023.

35. The Secretariat informed that NEASPEC is strongly encouraged to collaborate with TPDAP by SPC-3 and SPC-4. The Secretariat will further consult SPC members and national focal points to agree on specific modalities and areas for collaboration. The Secretariat requested support from China, Japan and the Republic of Korea in linking NEACAP with TPDAP. In addition, the Secretariat clarified that the presentation of authors on the policy analysis report has yet to be consulted with SPC members and national focal points. Once the national experts are nominated, the Secretariat will organize an inception meeting by bringing all nominated experts to start the development of the draft report. In addition, the Secretariat will also organize the first policy dialogue to review the draft report when it is ready and the second policy dialogue to finalize the report and disseminate the findings.

36. The Meeting approved the proposed amendment to the Rules of Procedures of the NEACAP Science and Policy Committee on the rotation of the SPC chairpersonship and the proposed activity plan on air pollution for 2022 to 2023.

Agenda item 5 (b) Biodiversity and Nature Conservation

37. Noting the progress achieved by NEASPEC in biodiversity and nature conservation, the Meeting reviewed the implementation of the project "Transboundary cooperation on the

conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards in North-East Asia”, a study on the Tumen River Estuary, and the proposed activity plan on biodiversity and nature conservation for 2022 to 2023.

38. The representative of the Republic of Korea appreciated achievements made in the conservation of big cats in the transboundary region. She highlighted the bilateral cooperation between the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation on the conservation of Amur leopards through a signed MOU in September 2022 between the National Institute of Ecology (NIE) of the Republic of Korea and the Land of the Leopard National Park (LLNP) of the Russian Federation to conduct joint research. She also highlighted the cooperation between the LLNP with the Seoul National University and Tiger and Leopard Conservation Fund in 2022 on a genetic analysis of Amur tigers and Amur leopards, which confirmed a lower genetic diversity of Amur leopards than findings of previous studies. She informed the Meeting of an ongoing joint study of NIE and LLNP on the habitat analysis of Amur leopards in North-East Asia, including the Korean Peninsula. She indicated the plan to share the outcomes once it is available in early 2023. She supported the proposed activity plan for 2022 to 2023 and indicated an interest in hosting a workshop on biodiversity and nature conservation for transboundary cooperation in 2023.

39. The representative of China indicated its strong support for strengthening the transboundary cooperation on biodiversity and nature conservation based on further coordination and common understandings. He sought Secretariat’s clarification on the objectives of component 2 of the project, “Transboundary cooperation on the conservation of Amur tigers, Amur leopards, and Snow leopards in North-East Asia”, in terms of “expansion of the bordering protected areas in China for Amur tigers.

40. The representative of the Russian Federation expressed the country’s interest in the thematic area of biodiversity and nature conservation and appreciated its bilateral cooperation with China on biodiversity conservation and sustainable management of forests, with Mongolia on Snow leopards and with the Republic of Korea on Amur leopards through scientific research. She also expected fruitful outcomes of the bilateral cooperation on Snow leopards and the Global Snow Leopard Conservation Meeting to be held in October 2022 in Kyrgyzstan.

41. The representative of Mongolia expressed appreciation to the Secretariat for its progress report on biodiversity and nature conservation area. She acknowledged the intervention made by the Russian Federation and appreciated the progress made by the bilateral cooperation on Snow leopards. In addition, noting that Mongolia registered several sites near its border under UNESCO, she indicated the need for consultation meetings after the adoption of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to discuss how to mainstream biodiversity conservation into the global sustainable development agenda. She informed the Meeting that Mongolia will host the Greater Tumen Initiative (GTI) Environment Board Meeting in November 2023 and encouraged NEASPEC to strengthen its engagement with GTI Secretariat on relevant work programmes. She supported the proposed activity plan for 2022 to 2023 but suggested postponing the organization of a workshop on biodiversity and nature conservation for transboundary cooperation from the second or third quarter of 2023 to the fourth quarter of 2023.

42. The representative of Japan encouraged the Secretariat to closely coordinate with the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), noting that EAAFP plays a critical role in conserving migratory waterbirds and their habitats, and established partnerships with 18 member States, including some of NEASPEC member States. He stressed that the proposed activities under NEASPEC should avoid duplication of EAAFP.

43. The Secretariat appreciated the interest of the Republic of Korea in organizing the workshop on biodiversity and nature conservation for transboundary cooperation in 2023 and noted Mongolia's suggestion of postponing the organization of the workshop to the fourth quarter of 2023 (Activity B.2). The Secretariat confirmed the continued collaboration with GTI Secretariat on the work related to the Tumen River estuary cooperation in the past and future. The Secretariat also provided clarifications to the question raised by the delegation of China, indicating that the proposal to expand existing bordering protected areas and establish a cross-border protected area for Amur tigers was a recommendation by the implementing partners, which has yet to be developed and confirmed. The Secretariat also noted the suggestion by the delegation of Japan. It confirmed that the NEASPEC Secretariat has been working with EAAFP to advance the NEASPEC work programme on migratory birds.

44. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan on biodiversity and nature conservation for 2022 to 2023.

Agenda item 5 (c) Marine Protected Areas

45. The Meeting noted the progress of NEAMPAN activities since the SOM-24 and reviewed the proposed activity plan on marine protected areas for 2022 to 2023.

46. The representative of China indicated its full support for the proposed activity plan with two suggestions: firstly, to promote the development of NEAMPAN on a voluntary basis, China suggested expanding the number and scales of MPAs sites of NEAMPAN among member States to share experiences; secondly, to also focus on the conservation of rare marine species in North-East Asia to promote marine biodiversity further.

47. The representative of the Republic of Korea also supported the proposed activity plan and highlighted the government's policy implementation and initiatives on sustainable use and management of marine resources, expansion of the MPAs, restoration of marine ecosystems and blue carbon research. She indicated that the Republic of Korea aims to expand the designation of up to 20 per cent of territorial water as MPAs by 2030 and will continue its concrete efforts for the marine environment based on the potential adoption of the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework in December 2022. Another representative of the Republic of Korea also took the floor, requesting the Secretariat to update the published information related to Gochang Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area and Suncheon Bay Wetland Protected Area, noting they have been inscribed as the UNESCO World Natural Heritage. Considering the outstanding and universal value of MPAs, she also suggested further enhancing cooperation with member States for the conservation and sustainable management of MPAs through NEAMPAN.

48. The representative of Japan requested suspension on decisions for the expansion of the number and scale of MPA sites of NEAMPAN among member States for further internal consultations. Later, the representative of Japan confirmed its support for the expansion of NEAMPAN sites.

49. The representative of the Republic of Korea also requested the Secretariat to inform member States of the specific procedures to nominate additional MPAs as NEAMPAN sites. The Secretariat clarified that the NEAMPAN sites would be received through the Steering Committee. With this regard, the Secretariat will convey the decision of SOM-25 to the Steering Committee and follow up with member States on the expansion of NEAMPAN sites.

50. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan on marine protected areas and agreed to expand the NEAMPAN sites among member States.

Agenda item 5 (d) Low Carbon Cities

51. The Meeting noted the progress of the NEA-LCCP activities, in particular, the project of “Leveraging Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for Low Carbon and Resilient Cities”, which includes four components of needs assessments of Mongolia and the Russian Federation; identification and selection of suitable cases based on the assessment results and development of training materials; knowledge sharing through the First International Forum on Low Carbon Cities; and capacity building through a training workshop on STI. The Meeting also reviewed the proposed activity plan for low carbon cities for 2022 to 2023.

52. The representative of Mongolia expressed appreciation to the Secretariat and partner institutions for the work conducted. She recognized the importance of hosting the international forum on low carbon cities as means of knowledge sharing and learning from other member States. She supported the Second International Forum on Low Carbon Cities to be held from 6 to 8 December 2022, indicating that the government will ensure the participation of relevant cities from Mongolia to share their experiences of low carbon cities development at the forum.

53. The representative of Japan appreciated the efforts of the Secretariat’s progress in the NEA-LCCP activities. He highlighted the significant role of cities in decarbonization, indicating that cities accounted for 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. He also emphasized that 94 per cent of Japan’s subregional areas declared zero-carbon cities, which is aligned with the goal of carbon neutrality by 2050. In addition to the ongoing measures and actions taken by national and local governments in Japan for low carbon cities development, he noted Japan’s promotion of cooperative projects among cities and international forums for capacity building.

54. The representative of the Republic of Korea reiterated the value of NEA-LCCP for facilitating knowledge sharing and capacity building to develop low carbon cities, through which the Republic of Korea contributed to a peer review workshop and a comparative study of national policies on low carbon cities. She highlighted the Smart Green City project that has been implemented by the Ministry

of Environment of the Republic of Korea since 2021, which provides tailored solutions to 25 selected local cities in climate resilience, carbon emissions reduction, recycling, and air pollution management. She indicated continued support of the Republic of Korea for climate action by promoting NEA-LCCP activities for knowledge sharing and capacity building.

55. The representative of China appreciated the Secretariat and partner organizations for the progress and achievements of LCCP activities and supported the proposed activity plan on low carbon cities for 2022 to 2023. He requested the Secretariat's clarification on the nature of the compendium of good practices from the cities and city networks in the subregion as proposed in Activity B.1. The Secretariat clarified that the compendium is promotional material to introduce what the cities have been doing in the subregion, rather than a research report.

56. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan on low carbon cities for 2022 to 2023.

Agenda item 5 (e) Desertification and Land Degradation

57. The Meeting recalled the decision of SOM-22 on the need for re-orientation of 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. The Meeting noted the overall progress of DLD activities under the NEASPEC, including *the stock-taking study on the interlinkage of DLD and climate change, the study on the impacts of climate change on desertification, land degradation and drought (DLDD) in North-East Asia*, and consultations with the Northeast Asia Network for Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought (DLDD-NEAN). The Meeting reviewed the proposed activity plan for 2022 to 2023.

58. The representative of Mongolia stated that DLD is the thematic area to which Mongolia could lead and contribute. She reaffirmed Mongolia's interest in hosting the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) tentatively in October 2022 and preferably in person. She invited member States' feedback on potential dates and modalities for the EGM. She highlighted that the EGM would invite DLDD-NEAN to discuss how NEASPEC could collaborate with them and avoid duplicated activities.

59. The representative of the Republic of Korea highlighted the country's continuous efforts to address DLD issues through bilateral and multilateral cooperation with North-East Asian countries, including Korea-Mongolia Greenbelt Project, joint research with China and work with DLDD-NEAN. She appreciated the Secretariat's study on the interlinkage of climate change and DLD and requested the Secretariat to develop more concrete action plans on this matter. She also highlighted the need for the NEASPEC Secretariat to avoid duplicated work programmes of DLDD-NEAN. With regard to the potential dates of EGM in Mongolia, she confirmed the participation of experts from the Republic of Korea and suggested that the meeting be held on or after November 2022.

60. The Secretariat noted the guidance by member States, including creating synergies of activities with other mechanisms, including DLDD-NEAN. Regarding the EGM, the Secretariat indicated that the timing depends on the format of the meeting, and the Secretariat would need sufficient time to prepare an in-person EGM, which is unlikely to take place in October 2022.

61. The Meeting approved the proposed activity plan on DLD for 2022 to 2023.

Agenda item 6. Renewed commitments to NEASPEC

62. The Meeting noted the recommendation of NEASPEC independent evaluation in 2020 to update NEASPEC's long-term vision, mission and goals to align with the ambition and intention of its member States, noting significant changes in the global, regional and national landscape for environmental cooperation. The Meeting also noted the Non-paper for information and informal consultation titled "Provisional Outline of the Statement/Declaration on Renewed Commitments to NEASPEC".

63. The representative of the Republic of Korea supported renewing the commitments to NEASPEC in celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2023. She highlighted that the renewed commitments would enhance NEASPEC's institutional basis with the updated long-term vision and goals, noting it is the only intergovernmental mechanism with the participation of all six member States in North-East Asia. She agreed with the general structure and elements included in the provisional outline and requested the Secretariat to develop a draft of renewed commitments based on the provisional outline. She also indicated that the draft will be reviewed at the next national focal point meeting in 2023 for further consideration of member States' approval at SOM-26.

64. China agreed to develop a document on renewed commitments to NEASPEC to reflect significant changes in the global, regional and national landscape for environmental cooperation, based on an open, inclusive, transparent and consensus-based consultation process. China informed that GDI received wide support from the international community, including over 60 countries joining the Group of Friends of GDI. Noting the challenges caused by the pandemic, he expressed an urgent need for the international community to take action to achieve the SDGs. Noting that GDI is a driving force well aligned with the NEASPEC priorities and the global development agenda, he stressed the importance of reflecting the GDI in the renewed commitments to NEASPEC.

65. The representative of Mongolia expressed full support for developing a document of renewed commitments to NEASPEC. She highlighted the ongoing significant momentums, including the expected outcomes of the Seventh Committee on Environment and Development of ESCAP at the ministerial level; potential adoption of the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework in December 2022; and increased net-zero pledges by countries, among other dynamics of global agenda. She reiterated that the SOM-26, in the celebration of its 30th anniversary, is the right time to consider the adoption of renewed commitments to NEASPEC.

66. The representative of the Russian Federation also supported the development of a document of renewed commitments to NEASPEC, highlighting the need to formulate it in line with national priorities. She also supported intersessional consultations on the draft.

67. Noting the guidance from member States, the Secretariat clarified that the renewed commitments document aims better to reflect the ambition and goals of NEASPEC member States

and requested member States to provide comments on the provisional outline by 31 October 2022. Subsequently, the Secretariat will develop a draft for review and consultations through national focal point meetings and submit it to the SOM-26 for consideration of adoption by member States.

68. The member States agreed with the abovementioned process, with the delegation of China reiterating the need for an open, inclusive, transparent and consensus-based consultation process. The decision on this agenda item is reflected in section I, Conclusions and Recommendations of this report.

Agenda item 7. Review of the Core Fund and Project-based Fund

69. The Meeting noted the status of the NEASPEC Core Fund and Project-based Fund as of 30 June 2022, including the expenses for the project period of 2016 to 2020, which reflected substantial savings related to travel and meeting costs due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Meeting also noted the status of the NEASPEC budget for the project period of 2021 to 2025. Considering the continuation of COVID-19, the Meeting considered the Secretariat's proposed revised budget plan for 2021 to 2025, redeploying travel budgets to contractual services, operating expenses and supplies.

70. The Meeting expressed appreciation to member States and partner organizations that have made financial and/or in-kind contributions to the Core Fund and Project-based Fund.

71. The representative of the Republic of Korea supported the endorsement of the revised budget plan for 2021 to 2025. She indicated that the Republic of Korea would continue contributing to the Core Fund and encouraged other member States to make voluntary contributions to ensure the effective implementation of NEASPEC activities. She noted China's continuing contributions to the Core Fund and recognized Mongolia's contributions starting in 2022.

72. The representative of China also supported the endorsement of the revised budget plan and reaffirmed its continued contributions to NEASPEC.

73. The representative of Mongolia echoed the support for endorsing the revised budget plan and indicated Mongolia's willingness to consider further contributions to the budget in line with the potential renewed commitments.

G. Venue, date, and provisional agenda of the Twenty-sixth Senior Officials Meeting (Agenda item 8)

74. The Meeting discussed the venue, date, and agenda of the Twenty-sixth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-26) of NEASPEC. The Meeting expressed its appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Korea for generously offering to host SOM-26 with the format of the meeting to be confirmed considering the COVID-19 pandemic. The proposed dates, venue and 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)**

75. The representative of Japan suggested that SOM-26 take place in or after June 2023, considering Japan will host the G-7 Summit in May 2023.

**I. Adoption of the Report
(Agenda item 10)**

76. The Meeting expressed deep appreciation to the Government of Japan for hosting/chairing the Twenty-fifth Senior Officials Meeting despite the challenge of COVID-19 and to the Secretariat for the excellent preparation of the virtual meeting.

77. The Meeting adopted the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Twenty-fifth Senior Officials Meeting on 21 September 2022. The report of the Meeting was finalized and adopted by circulating among the member States after the Twenty-Fifth Senior Officials Meeting.

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