

Annex II Consultation Paper

Proposed Approach and Criteria for NEAMPAN Sites Expansion

1. Background

The East and North-East Asia (ENEA) Office of the Economic and Social Commission of East Asia and Pacific (ESCAP), serving as the Secretariat of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), has established the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) in 2013 under the framework of NEASPEC. The NEAMPAN, aiming to be an effective, functional and representative network of marine protected areas (MPAs), has 12 MPA sites (as of October 2023): six from China, one from Japan, three from the Republic of Korea and two from the Russian Federation. It seeks to promote 1) protection of key marine animals and habitats; 2) sustainable use of marine resources; 3) effective MPA management; and 4) collaboration with relevant networks and programmes, through capacity-building activities and networking with regional and global mechanisms.

The NEAMPAN has a Steering Committee (SC) nominated by the respective member States to provide the policy and operation guidance for the NEAMPAN activities, and reports to the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC on its recommendations and matters that require attention and/or decisions of the SOM. At the SOM-25 in September 2022, the member States recommended the expansion of NEAMPAN sites among member States to further promote and strengthen knowledge sharing and partnerships.

In response to the member States' recommendation, the Secretariat presents this proposed approach and criteria to expand NEAMPAN sites, for the SC's consultation and endorsement, and thereafter for the Senior Officials Meeting's consideration and approval.

2. Proposed approaches and criteria for the expansion of NEAMPAN sites

In order to propose an approach to expand the NEAMPAN sites, the Secretariat conducted a preliminary stocktaking of NEAMPAN activities since its establishment in 2013 (Table 1 of Annex I), analyzing common features and interest of the existing 12 MPAs (Table 2 of Annex I). Based on the findings, the Secretariat developed this draft proposal for NEAMPAN expansion, with SC members' consultation and endorsement, for member States' consideration and approval at SOM-26.

2.1. Stocktaking of NEAMPAN sites and activities

MPA networks could take various forms¹: 1) **social networks**, focusing on networking among MPA managers, practitioners, administrative agencies and management offices and formed by communication, sharing of information and results, and coordination of administration and planning; 2) **ecological networks**, formed by natural connections of species and habitats between and within sites to enhance the ecological characters and functions of MPAs; and 3)

¹ NEASPEC, 2013. Background Report on the Terms of References of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network. https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Annex%20_SOM18_Marine%20Protected%20Areas.pdf

management-based networks, formed by creating consistency and efficiency among MPAs in enforcement, monitoring, capacity building and awareness raising² and aiming to enhance management effectiveness on a larger ecosystem-based scale than that of a single MPA.³

The Terms of References (ToR) for NEAMPAN suggest that it should start as a social network, which focuses more on management improvement and cooperation among MPAs.⁴ Since its establishment, NEAMPAN has facilitated the learning and cooperation among member countries, SC members, MPA managers and institutions to share information and enhance management efforts. In line with the guidance of the SC, the member States designated 12 MPAs from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation and the Secretariat conducted a series of activities and organized four SC meetings, as detailed in Table 1 of Annex I to this document.

NEAMPAN can further progress to develop into a more ecologically coherent network by connecting areas with similar ecological features, management challenges, or key migratory species needing protection (e.g., Spotted Seals, Black-faced Spoonbills, and Sea Turtles). The narrative below outlines the current status, possible approach, and strategic framework.

1) NEAMPAN is still in its early development phase and operates with a country-driven focus.

NEAMPAN is currently in its early stage of development as a social network and has not yet been fully scaled up in terms of the number of MPAs and the scope of activities. Despite the conducted activities and research since its establishment, including considerations of the impacts of COVID-19, NEAMPAN is not yet functioning as a fully operational network capable of maximizing visibility and impact at the subregional level.

In order to improving the impacts of NEAMPAN, the Secretariat will continue coordinating the NEAMPAN under the guidance of member States and following the well-established country-driven processes (e.g. governance structures, rules and procedures), while fulfilling any identified gaps to advance the NEAMPAN development in an effective manner. The Secretariat will continue organizing capacity-building activities and research to meet the needs of member States and their designated MPAs.

The forthcoming activities will necessitate a more programmatic approach, with additional strategic guidance from member States yet to be consulted. Based on the lessons learned from past NEAMPAN activities, the Secretariat has encountered challenges concerning the attendance of representatives at in-person events. To address this, the Secretariat intends to explore diverse channels for future communications and activities, which may include, but not

² Jung-ho Nam, 2016. Benefits and Challenges of MPAs Network. NEAMPAN Workshop 2016 on “Sharing Experiences in MPA Management” & 2nd Steering Committee Meeting. <https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/1.%20Benefits%20and%20challenges%20of%20MPA%20network.pdf>

³ NOAA, National Marine Sanctuaries Programme. MPA Networks Training Module available at https://nmssanctuaries.blob.core.windows.net/sanctuaries-prod/media/archive/management/pdfs/js_mentor_networks_mod2_curr.pdf

⁴ NEASPEC, 2013. Background Report on the Terms of References of the North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network. https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/Annex%20_SOM18_Marine%20Protected%20Areas.pdf

limited to virtual meetings and webinars, E-learning and capacity building, subregional workshops, online surveys and polls, etc.

Specific implications for the expansion of NEAMPAN sites exist. A critical near-term priority by 2025 is to "develop NEAMPAN to be fully functional for strengthening partnerships among target MPAs and stakeholders and enhancing capacity to achieve, inter alia, SDG14 and relevant goals associated with marine and coastal biodiversity in a holistic manner." To achieve this goal, NEAMPAN necessitates a diverse and sizeable participant pool to effectively leverage partnerships and amplify its impact. However, the fact that NEAMPAN is country-driven and still in its early stage of development entails that this expansion should be aligned with established country-driven processes, ensuring adherence to principles and governance structures that maintain the initiative's focus and effectiveness.

2) NEAMPAN may consider a "twinning" approach among its MPAs to enhance common and connected ecological characters;

NEAMPAN's vision to develop itself into an ecological network needs further exploration on a targeted cooperation for certain ecological characters (e.g. natural connection and linkages of a targeted marine species or habitat). The proposed twinning approach, or sister sites, is an approach to bring together existing and potential NEAMPAN sites in different countries that possess shared key species or connectivity of habitats. This approach aims to better assist MPAs through conducting collaborative activities for their conservation efforts. Should the member States agree on the proposed twinning approach, the Secretariat, with the policy and technical guidance from the SC, would support NEAMPAN countries in conducting dedicated studies to 1) explore the feasibility of the proposed approach; and 2) delve into the ecological connectivity of migratory species and their habitats in the subregion.

3) A strategic framework of NEAMPAN with prioritized themes and phased action plans are needed;

Within the existing NEASPEC framework and strategy, NEAMPAN focuses on four priority themes: 1) protection of key marine animals and habitats; 2) sustainable use of marine resources; 3) effective MPA management; and 4) collaboration with relevant networks and programmes. In addition to these themes, NEAMPAN MPAs at the 2016 NEAMPAN Workshop⁵ indicated common interests in scientific research (e.g. marine spatial planning, monitoring of ecosystems and ecological characters).

These themes may imply different prioritizations and selection criteria for member countries to nominate potential MPA sites to expand the NEAMPAN. The potential selection criteria to nominate MPA sites may include, but not limited to 1) the ecological viability and integrity of species (e.g. MPAs with appropriate spatial distribution, a representative ecological feature and connectivity of marine ecosystems); 2) economic and social benefits; 3) partnerships; and 4) management capacity and effectiveness.

⁵ NEASPEC 2016, Meeting Report of 2016 North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) Workshop available at https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2016%20NEAMPAN_workshop%20report_Final.pdf

Taking the opportunity of NEAMPAN expansion, member States at SOM-26 may consider further discussions to explore NEAMPAN's strategic vision with prioritized themes and action plans. Built upon the existing NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 and four priority themes, the discussions on a potential NEAMPAN strategic framework would 1) enable member States to expand the NEAMPAN sites in a more strategic and coordinated way in the long term; 2) provide existing and potential MPAs with a clearer and common vision and incentives to collaborate; 3) better align NEAMPAN's latest development with ESCAP's regional strategies and priorities in a dynamic manner; and 4) provide a more fit-for-purpose guidance to the NEAMPAN Secretariat to advance the expansion and carry out future capacity-building activities in a streamlined and programmatic manner.

Should the member states approve to convene discussions to explore NEAMPAN's strategic framework as a planned activity for 2024, the Secretariat would provide operational support to coordinate and consult with relevant stakeholders (e.g. governments, SC members, MPA managers and relevant experts) for the discussions.

2.2. Proposed approach and criteria for the expansion of NEAMPAN sites

Considering the abovementioned stocktaking, the Secretariat would propose a two-phased approach to expanding the NEAMPAN sites for member States' discussion and consideration at SOM-26, with prior SC's consultation and endorsement.

Recognizing the NEASPEC Strategic Plan, it is crucial to fully fledge NEAMPAN's functionality by 2025 as a social network, necessitating a large and diverse pool of MPAs to leverage partnerships and impacts. Therefore, the Secretariat suggests that from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2025, the member States have the full discretion to designate new MPAs with minimal criteria and no cap on the number, as appropriate and on a rolling basis, for phase-one expansion of NEAMPAN. The Secretariat will analyze the data and present the preliminary results to the SC and SOM meeting.

The minimal criteria to consider may include: 1) MPAs' alignment with national strategies for biodiversity and marine conservation; and 2) their institutional capacity for participating regional and international events (e.g. English skills, experiences in regional or international settings, multilateral partnerships). By this approach, NEAMPAN would aim for a drastic increase in the number of NEAMPAN sites, which would enable the increased visibility of NEAMPAN at the subregional level and possible identification of common interests and ecological characters towards "twinning" MPAs at a later stage for knowledge sharing and capacity building.

At the operational level, the Secretariat recommends the member States to submit the following supporting documents to the Secretariat on a rolling basis: 1) a list of nominated MPAs; 2) an elaboration of factors/criteria being considered for such nominations; and 3) a detailed introduction document of each nominated MPAs.

Built upon the increased participating MPAs in NEAMPAN post phase one, phase-two expansion could be more targeted to involve certain MPAs that would enhance the common interests of NEAMPAN (e.g. twinning approach, sectoral collaborations, etc). Dependent on the

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dynamic development of the NEAMPAN after phase-one expansion, the member States may consider a dedicated study, with technical support of SC members and expert consultants, to explore a comprehensive and more stringent set of criteria for MPAs to join NEAMPAN during phase-two expansion. This study may enable the phase-two expansion to fit for the purpose of the ESCAP's regional priorities and NEAMPAN strategic development.

Annex I

Table 1 Overview of NEAMPAN Activities Since Establishment

Activities	Time and Location	Activities Highlights
NEASPEC/NOWPAP Joint Workshop	13-14 March 2013, Toyama, Japan	(i) shared information on the details of MPAs, including definition, categories and monitoring/management status in each member state (ii) focused on MPA details, categorizations, and monitoring/management status in each member state
First Steering Committee Meeting	19-20 March 2014, Incheon, Republic of Korea	(i) clarified national approaches to MPA, strategic direction of the Network, target MPAs, network membership, as well as organizational and managerial structures (ii) agreed on the TOR of the Steering Committee, to define the role and responsibility of their own work as members of the Committee and to be submitted to the SOM-19 for endorsement
NEAMPAN Workshop 2016 and Second Steering Committee Meeting	15-16 June 2016, Suncheon, Republic of Korea	(i) shared experiences of MPA management in terms of 1. Assessment of ecosystem services and sustainable management of resources; 2. Sustainable management of human activities including tourism; and 3. Stakeholder participation. (ii) Shared experiences in partnership and networking among MPAs 1. Exchange experiences of interaction with other MPAs in various activities at national or international levels 2. Information on workshops / trainings provided by international organizations and NGOs
International Seminar on Marine Protected Areas in YSLME and North-East Asia	14 July 2017, Republic of Korea	(i) NEAMPAN and YSLME Project Management Office co-organized this seminar to contribute to the MPA designation process, as well as effective and equitable management of the coastal habitats to contribute to the achieving the SDG14 (ii) Field Visit to Coastal Wetlands of Ganghwa Island, Republic of Korea, which was co-hosted by Ganghwa County, Incheon, Republic of Korea

		(iii) Facilitated the sharing of experiences of MPA establishment and management in North-East Asian countries sharing experiences on MPA governance
Expert Workshop on Management Strategies and Monitoring & Assessment of Marine Protected Areas in North-East Asia	20 December 2018, Incheon, Republic of Korea	(i) NEAMPAN’s first project, “Strengthening the subregional cooperation through knowledge sharing on sustainable management of MPAs” focusing on management strategies and monitoring/assessment of the designated NEAMPAN sites startedSS (i) The first occasion for national experts to gather together to discuss on their preliminary findings and to ensure coherence among the studies on the NEAMPAN sites
NEAMPAN Project Review Meeting on Strengthening the Subregional Cooperation through Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Management of Marine Protected Areas	30 April 2019, Incheon, Republic of Korea	(i) provide an opportunity for the key project experts to align on their current understanding of the studies under the project, Strengthening the Subregional Cooperation through Knowledge Sharing on Sustainable Management of Marine Protected Areas”
Third NEAMPAN Steering Committee Meeting	23 April 2021, virtual	(i) provided key points of discussion and consideration for the NEAMPAN Steering Committee to identify the NEAMPAN activities in 2021 and beyond, and operationalized the Strategic Plan
NEAMPAN Workshop 2021	15 July 2021, virtual	(ii) provided simultaneous interpretation services in Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Russian to facilitate wider and active engagement from local MPA stakeholders (ii) indicated the need to expand NEAMPAN sites and requested the Secretariat to regularly communicate with NEAMPAN members
Webinar on climate change and MPAs; and Fourth Steering Committee meeting 2022	20 July 2022, virtual	(i) discussed the roles of MPAs and MPA networks to tackle climate change, and learned national and local-level policies and practices in North-East Asia

Table 2 Overview of 12 NEAMPAN Sites (as of October 2023)

MPA's name	Key species or protected targets	Management stress	International network
China			
Beilun Estuary National Marine Nature Reserve	Mangrove ecosystem	aquaculture and agriculture might cause potential impact ⁶	Ramsar site
Changyi National Marine Ecology Special Protected Area	<i>Tamarix chinensis</i> , marine organisms and coastal wetland ecosystems	Weak public awareness and resources exploitation activities	-
Nanji Islands National Marine Nature Reserve	Marine shellfish and algae as well as their habitats	Loss of marine and terrestrial life due to large-scale collection and harvest ⁷	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve
National Nature Reserve of Dazhou Island Marine Ecosystems	Swiftlet, its habitat and the marine ecological system	Insufficient funding, illegal tourism and overfishing	-
Sanya Coral Reef National Nature Reserve	Coral reef and the marine ecological system	Climate change, marine contamination and human activities	-
Shankou Mangrove National Marine Nature Reserve	7 bird species of global threatened listed by IUCN, Mangrove ecosystem	Destruction of mangrove forest due to economic activities ⁸ Afforestation of mangrove forests since 2002 restored	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve; and Ramsar site

⁶ Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (2006-2008 version) for Beilun Estuary

⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/mabdb/br/brdir/directory/biores.asp?code=CPR+15&mode=all>

⁸ Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (2001 version) for Shankou Mangrove

		approx. 200 ha mangrove forests ⁹	
Japan			
Shiretoko National Park	Marine ecosystem, rare salmonids, cetaceans, sea lions and seals as well as their habitats	Protection of endangered and rare species, sustainable development of fisheries	UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site
Republic of Korea			
Muan Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area	Habitats and spawning site for endangered and rare birds	Prevention of coastal environmental pollution	Ramsar site
Suncheon Bay Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area	Hooded Crane, phragmites communis community	Tidal flat restoration, marine pollution prevention and management	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve; and Ramsar site
Gochang Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area	Migratory birds, Oriental White Stork, Saunders's gull, Far Eastern curlew and Chinese egret	Management and investigation of tidal flat ecosystem	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve; and Ramsar site
Russian Federation			
Far-Eastern State Marine Biosphere Reserve	Conservation of marine ecosystems and support for marine biological research	Over-exploitation of marine and recreational resources ¹⁰	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve

⁹ Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands (2006-2008 version) for Shankou Mangrove

¹⁰ NEAMPAN MPA profiles provided by the Russian Federation

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Sikhote-Alin State Natural Biosphere Reserve	Conservation and study of the natural functioning of natural complexes in totality	Prevent illegal poaching on terrestrial and at sea	UNESCO-MAB Biosphere Reserve; and UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site
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(Source: NEASPEC, 2016 NEAMPAN Workshop Report available at https://neaspec.org/sites/default/files/2023-01/2016%20NEAMPAN_workshop%20report_Final.pdf)