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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5(c) of the provisional agenda)

Marine Protected Areas

Note by the Secretariat

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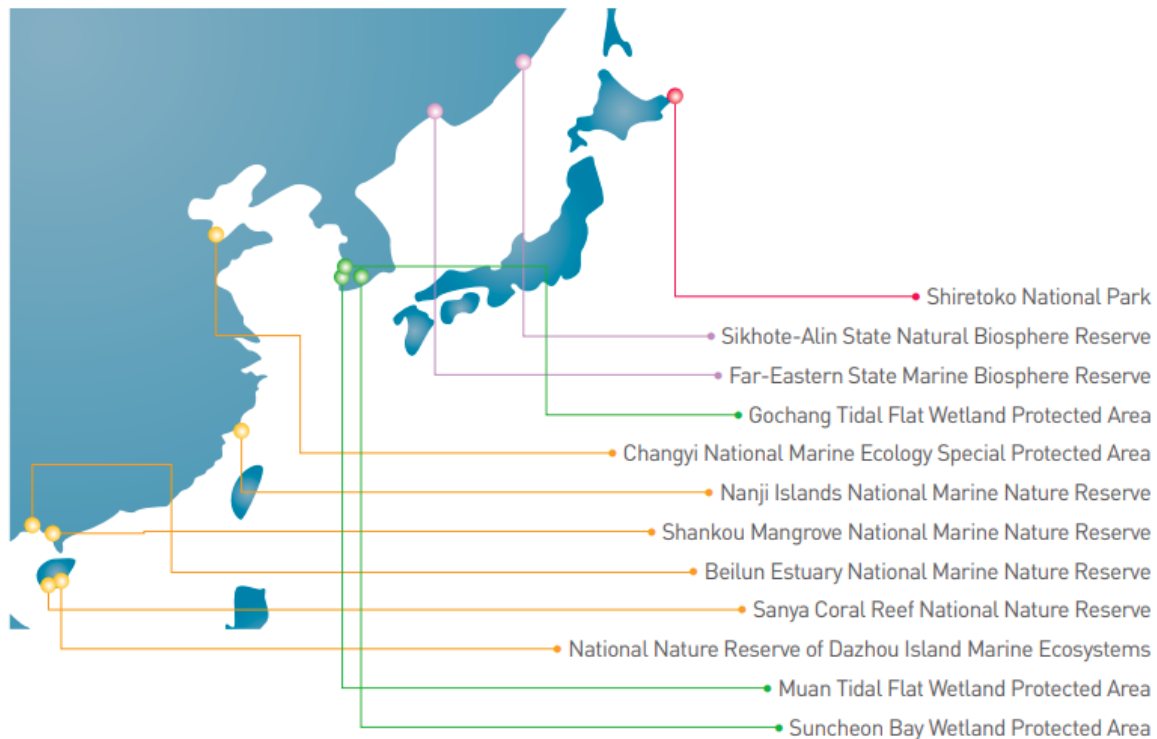
Annex III. (draft) Activity plan for marine protected areas in 2024

I. BACKGROUND

1. The North-East Asian Marine Protected Areas Network (NEAMPAN) was launched under the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) in November 2013 at the 18th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-18), aiming to strengthen subregional cooperation on marine environment, coastal biodiversity and effective MPAs management. At the same meeting, the NEAMPAN Steering Committee was established based on the nominations from each NEAMPAN country. The committee is mandated to provide policy and technical guidance to the NEASPEC Secretariat. Additionally, it is responsible for planning, monitoring, and recommending NEAMPAN activities and programmes.

2. Through information sharing, joint research and monitoring projects, capacity-building activities and networking with relevant stakeholders, this subregional network acts as a key platform in East and North-East Asia for 1) protection of key marine animals and their habitats; 2) sustainable use of marine resources; 3) effective MPAs management; and 4) partnership and collaboration with other regional and global MPA networks and programmes. As of 2023, the NEAMPAN has 12 sites nominated by the member States, including six in China, one in Japan, three in the Republic of Korea, and two in the Russian Federation (Figure 1).

Figure 1. NEAMPAN Sites



3. The global community has signaled strong political will and reinforced commitment to tackle ocean emergency and implement the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life below water)

through several recent international agreements. In March 2023, after nearly two decades of multilateral negotiations, a historic High Seas Treaty was adopted by the UN member countries¹. This treaty focuses on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and aims to provide vital protection for the ocean against marine pollution, overfishing and habitat degradation. In addition, member States committed to the landmark Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted in December 2022, with the “30X30” target to protect at least 30 per cent of lands and seas through protected areas and other area-based conservation measures.² Moreover, it is worth expecting another international legally binding agreement by 2024 to end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment.³

4. The NEAMPAN has been well positioned to advance the global and regional agenda on marine protection. As reported to the earlier SOMs, the NEASPEC Secretariat, with the policy and technical guidance from the NEAMPAN Steering Committee, has implemented a series of projects and activities to strengthen partnerships of NEAMPAN stakeholders and advanced the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, relevant goals associated with marine and coastal biodiversity and the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021 to 2025.

5. This report focuses on the reporting of the progress of NEAMPAN activities since the SOM-25 in 2022. At SOM-25, the NEASPEC member States approved the NEAMPAN activities for 2022 to 2023, including 1) organization of a NEAMPAN webinar to discuss the implications on MPAs within the context of the Post-2020 global biodiversity framework, UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030), UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration (2021-2030), NDCs related to coastal ecosystems; 2) organization of a NEAMPAN workshop to share MPAs’ roles and practices for addressing climate change and biodiversity loss; 3) a study on climate change and marine protected areas in North-East Asia and policy options to ensure sustainable development; and 4) the expansion of NEAMPAN sites among member States to further promote and strengthen knowledge sharing and partnerships.

II. UPDATE ON THE NEAMPAN PROJECT AND ACTIVITIES

NEAMPAN Webinar 2023: Accelerating Ocean-Based Actions for Sustainable Development

6. The Secretariat organized the NEAMPAN Webinar 2023 on 13 September 2023 to discuss NEAMPAN’s role and MPAs’ practices in accelerating ocean-based actions for the achievement

¹ UN delegates reach historic agreement on protecting marine biodiversity in international waters, 2023. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/03/1134157>

² Convention on Biological Diversity, 2022. <https://www.cbd.int/article/cop15-cbd-press-release-final-19dec2022>

³ UNEP, Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Plastic Pollution. <https://www.unep.org/inc-plastic-pollution>

of sustainable development. The webinar was well attended by about 70 participants including NEAMPAN member countries, Steering Committee members, NEAMPAN site managers and local stakeholders, international organizations, academia and youth organizations.

7. Within the context of the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in December 2022 and the ESCAP's resolution on Regional Cooperation to Accelerate Climate Action on Oceans in Asia and the Pacific for Sustainable Development at its 79th Commission Session in May 2023, the Webinar invited the Secretariat of Convention on Biological Diversity to introduce the global targets under the Kunming-Montreal GBF and their implications on regional and subregional ocean-based actions, and the potential roles that NEAMPAN can play for marine and biodiversity conservation in the North-East Asia subregion.

8. In addition, the International Union for Conservation of Nature Asia Regional Office focused on the situation analysis on ecosystems of the Yellow Sea, with particular emphasis on recommended MPA efforts and nature-based solutions in the subregion. With information exchange and discussions on the strategies and ongoing efforts of NEAMPAN MPAs, it is clear that in order to achieve the "30X30" goals, it requires more innovative ways to enhance MPAs management effectiveness and networking.

9. In summary, the webinar 1) facilitated the latest information sharing and knowledge exchange on the ocean-based actions among stakeholders; 2) promoted NEAMPAN's role and visibility in marine and coastal biodiversity conservation in the subregion; 3) strengthened partnerships among its MPAs and relevant stakeholders; and 4) raised public awareness of MPAs' practices in each NEAMPAN member country, especially for youth.

NEAMPAN Workshop 2023: Addressing Climate Change and Marine Biodiversity Loss & Roles of MPAs - Postponed to 2024

10. As per the NEAMPAN planned activity approved at SOM-25, the Secretariat intended to host an in-person workshop among Steering Committee members and 12 MPAs in Suncheon, Republic of Korea in September 2023 to discuss MPAs' roles in address climate change impacts and opportunities for collaboration through the NEAMPAN. The draft concept note of the workshop was circulated to and cleared by the Steering Committee (SC) members by 20 April 2023.

11. However, the Secretariat faced challenges in confirming a date that would fit all NEAMPAN member countries, and furthermore noted that certain SC members and MPA managers had difficulties in international travels this year. In this regard, the Secretariat provided an update to the National Focal Point Meeting dated 25 April 2023 and requested for an

adjustment to the initial plan with two possible options: 1) converting the in-person workshop into an online webinar; or 2) hosting an in-person workshop in China, considering China has 6 (out of 12) NEAMPAN sites.

12. To optimize the effectiveness of the workshop and ensure NEAMPAN's visibility and impacts in the subregion, the Secretariat attempted to host an in-person workshop in China and coordinated with Chinese National Focal Point, National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA), SC members and relevant MPAs. With guidance from China's NFGA, an administration that oversees and undertakes lead responsibility in the conservation and management of China's marine protected areas (among other areas), the Secretariat shall seek approval to host the workshop in the beginning of 2024.

13. Noting the situation, the Secretariat will continue the discussions with China's NFGA on the plan to host the in-person workshop no later than Q2 June 2024. The Secretariat would like to seek member States' support at SOM-26 on this matter.

A study of Ocean-Based Climate Actions of the NEAMPAN Sites in the Republic of Korea

14. In line with the approved decisions at SOM-25 and the Resolution on Regional Cooperation to Accelerate Climate Action on Oceans in Asia and the Pacific for Sustainable Development adopted by the 79th Commission Session of ESCAP in May 2023, the Secretariat initiated a tailored study to explore the latest challenges and impacts of climate changes on NEAMPAN member States and 12 MPA sites. Aiming to deepen the understanding and knowledge of climate change impacts on MPAs and their roles and actions to tackle such impacts, the Secretariat plans to start with its first tailored study focusing on the Republic of Korea and its three NEAMPAN sites (i.e. Muan Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area, Suncheon Bay Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area and Gochang Tidal Flat Wetland Protected Area).

15. The Secretariat identified a senior specialist on marine protected areas from ROK, who is knowledgeable on ROK's ocean-based solutions to addressing climate change at national and local level. The study may further recommend policy options for the NEAMPAN to better assist the MPAs in scaling up and accelerating ocean-based climate actions in the country and with other NEAMPAN MPAs in the subregion. The Secretariat, with the support from expert consultants, expects to finalize the draft by Q2 2024.

16. Upon completion of this tailored study by Q2 2024, the Secretariat plans to continue undertaking such studies to analyse existing (if any) or potential ocean-based climate policies and actions of other NEAMPAN MPAs in China, Japan and the Russian Federation. This activity is

included in the Activity Plan for Marine Protected Areas in 2024 (Annex III) for the member States' consideration and approval at SOM-26.

Expansion of NEAMPAN Sites

17. In line with the recommendations presented by the member States during the 25th Session of the Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM-25) to augment the number of sites under NEAMPAN, with a view to fostering enhanced partnerships and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, the Secretariat undertook an initial assessment of NEAMPAN's progress and developments since its inception in 2013. This assessment provided insights into the shared characteristics and mutual interests across the 12 Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) currently in existence.

18. Based on the findings, the Secretariat developed a draft proposal for NEAMPAN expansion as included in the Annex II to this document, the Proposed Approach and Criteria for NEAMPAN Sites Expansion. The draft was consulted with the SC member from August 30 to September 18, 2023. It is included in the Annex II for member States' consideration and approval at SOM-26.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

19. In light of the increasing emphasis on ocean-related issues and management of marine resources for sustainable development at regional and global levels, the Meeting may wish to reiterate its encouragement for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to participate in NEAMPAN activities by nominating Steering Committee members, nominating MPA sites, and/or participating in the NEAMPAN workshops.

20. The Meeting may wish to request member States the following:

- (a) Review and approve the Proposed Approach and Criteria for NEAMPAN Sites Expansion (Annex II);
- (b) Express interest in hosting or jointly organizing MPA-related activities.

21. The Meeting may wish to review and approve the proposed activity plan (Annex III).

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