

Concept Note

National Focal Points Meeting of North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation

12 May 2021, Virtual meeting

1. Background

Mandated by the 23rd Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC), an independent evaluation was conducted in 2020 to assess NEASPEC's performance and achievements vis-à-vis the implementation of NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and the strengths and challenges with respect to its institutional setup, partnership arrangements, and resource mobilization. The evaluation concludes that NEASPEC has become the only comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism in the subregion adding unique value to the six member States through supporting their effective cooperation and bringing concerted efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The evaluation proposes seven recommendations to further strengthen the mechanism (see Annex 1). Member governments reviewed these recommendations initially at NEASPEC National Focal Points Meeting in August 2020, considered the recommendations and secretariat response at the 24th SOM in October 2020, and decided to hold a follow-up National Focal Point Meeting to develop and agree on a concrete implementation plan for addressing the evaluation recommendations with clear responsibilities and timelines.

2. Objectives

The proposed National Focal Points Meeting aims to convene focused discussions on two major topics of recommendations, i.e., (a) a renewed vision and commitment (Recommendation 1 and 2) and (b) funding modality (Recommendation 5), to develop NEASPEC as a more effective and comprehensive mechanism.

In this connection, objectives of the meeting are as follows:

- Examine the current institutional setup including the founding Framework and Vision Statement of NEASPEC as well as its funding mechanism;

- Exchange views and ideas on potential options for renewed vision and commitment, and funding modality; and
- Develop a follow-up plan towards the 25th SOM to be held in late 2021.

In addition, the Meeting will review the planned NEASPEC activities in 2021.

3. Programme

- **Date:** 14:00-18:30hrs (GMT+9), Wednesday, 12 May 2021
- **Format:** Virtual meeting
- **Participants:** National focal points of NEASPEC

Provisional Programme

14:00 - 18:30 (GMT+9), Wednesday, 12 May 2021	
14:00 - 14:15	<p>Opening Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening remarks, <i>Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head of ESCAP East and North-East Asia Office</i> • Introduction of the meeting, <i>NEASPEC Secretariat</i>
14:15 - 16:50	<p>Session 1: Address the recommendations of the NEASPEC independent evaluation</p> <p><i>Secretariat will moderate discussions to review the status quo of NEASPEC based on the conclusion and recommendations of the evaluation; and to identify options to address the recommendation 1, 2 and 5.</i></p> <p><i>Two background documents are prepared by the Secretariat to support this discussion.</i></p>
16:50 - 17:00	Break
17:00 - 18:00	<p>Session 2: Review of planned activities in 2021</p> <p><i>This session will review the 2021 activities and issues pertaining to the attention and support of NEASPEC National Focal Points.</i></p>
18:00 - 18:30	Conclusions

Annex 1: Recommendations of the NEASPEC independent evaluation

No. and actor(s)	Recommendation
Recommendation 1: <i>For NEASPEC secretariat and SOM</i>	<i>Decide whether or not to move forward in operationalizing NEASPEC in a way that would enable the full realization of its founding vision to be a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism.</i>
Recommendation 2: <i>FOR NEASPEC SECRETARIAT and SOM</i>	<i>Review the 1996 founding framework and update NEASPEC's charter so that it is aligned with the ambition and intention of the involved member States, as informed by the 27 years of cooperation and coordination and in light of the accelerative effect of using a Strategic Plan. As part of this endeavour, it would be pertinent to set a long-term vision, mission, and goals – and make values and principles presently tacit more explicit.</i>
Recommendation 3: <i>For SOM and NFPs</i>	<i>Honour the notion of high-level participation in SOM, as per the founding vision and provide for significantly more stability of designated NFPs.</i>
Recommendation 4: <i>For ESCAP's Executive Secretary and NEASPEC secretariat</i>	<i>Strengthen existing links and identify and broaden new communication and reporting channels between NEASPEC and ESCAP with a view to optimising the synergy of this relationship for mutual gain</i>
Recommendation 5: <i>For NEASPEC secretariat and SOM</i>	<i>Revise the funding modalities to enhance the reliability and level of funding flows, and review options for progressively moving towards more equitable contributions from all member States, with a roadmap towards this achievement.</i>
Recommendation 6: <i>For NEASPEC secretariat, SOM, and ESCAP</i>	<i>Enhance the resourcing of the NEASPEC Secretariat.</i>
Recommendation 7: <i>For NEASPEC secretariat</i>	<i>Use virtual meetings to enhance the frequency and quality of the intergovernmental connectedness being pursued under NEASPEC.</i>