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Beijing, China

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5(a) of the provisional agenda)

**THE PROJECT ON THE FRAMEWORK FOR A NATURE CONSERVATION
PROGRAMME IN NORTH-EAST ASIA**

Note by the Secretariat

I. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

1. As the 2nd SOM identified “ecosystem management” as one of three priority areas of subregional cooperation, from 2nd and 4th SOMs, the NEASPEC countries discussed a proposal on “the North-East Asian Biodiversity Management Programme” presented by UNDP as a Global Environmental Facility (GEF) project. However, securing fund for the project was not realized.
2. Having attained NEASPEC’s own financial resources by the establishment of the Core Fund, the Secretariat put forwarded to the 7th SOM in July 2001 a paper “Identification of Project Ideas” including a brief proposal for “North East Asia Nature Conservation Programme (NEANCP)”, which would focus on the establishment of a Regional Network of North-East Asian Heritage Parks and Nature Reserves in order to further enhance environmental cooperation in the subregion and strengthen the linkages between similar institutions in NEASPEC countries. The Meeting requested for further exploration and consultation at expert group meetings. In particular, the meeting agreed that the programme should initially focus on training and general information exchange based on consensus among the participating countries, and should avoid duplication of relevant regional programmes of other international organizations.
3. Subsequently, an Expert Group Meeting on Environmental Cooperation in North-East Asia was organized with the support of the Government of the Republic of Korea in December 2001 in Jeju Island. The discussion and guidance of the Meeting enabled the Secretariat to prepare “Proposals on Nature Conservation under NEASPEC”, which identified ongoing efforts in nature conservation at national and sub regional level in North-East Asia and proposed potential areas of cooperation. i.e., information and exchange mechanisms, North-East subregional network on protected areas, subregional agreement on protection of migratory animals, and North-East Asian subregional nature conservation centre. Migratory
4. The proposal was submitted to the 8th SOM in June 2002. The Meeting recommended establishing a working group of national focal points on nature conservation to identify priority areas for development of projects in nature conservation, initiate exchange of information to grasp issues and problems and to bring issues to the attention of governments for cooperative action. Taking into consideration the limited resources available, the Meeting also recommended that synergies should be developed with ongoing initiatives in the subregion in nature conservation without causing duplication.
5. Following the recommendation of the 8th SOM, the Working Group Meeting was established to convene the first meeting in July 2003. The Working Group Meeting identified a set of eight priority areas: the management of and cooperative research on nature reserves;

the conservation and sustainable use of wetland biodiversity; ecological monitoring and conservation of marine ecosystems and coastal zones; conservation and management of forest ecosystems; the conservation and recovery of large mammals; the conservation and management of grassland ecosystems; the conservation, monitoring and cooperative research on important migratory species; and the prevention and control of alien invasive species.

6. The 2nd Working Group Meeting held in conjunction with the 9th SOM in March 2004 concluded to focus on two priority areas: conservation and recovery of large mammals; and conservation, monitoring and co-operative research on important migratory species.

7. To facilitate the process of identification of common needs and activities for cooperation in relation to the two priority areas, the Secretariat initiated a survey on on-going activities in the NEASPEC countries and convened the 3rd Working Group Meeting in September 2004. The Meeting defined the approach of a new project as follows:

- Strengthen the decision-making process on nature conservation in North-East Asia by establishing a Senior Nature Conservation Officials Forum;
- Development of a subregional strategy for nature conservation and action plans for the conservation of threatened large mammals, mainly felines and threatened migratory birds, including pilot projects based on economic tools and participatory approaches by local communities;
- Strengthen the scientific basis for problem identification by developing and implementing a harmonized system for collection, gathering, analysis and management of data on nature conservation, in particular in the areas of threatened large mammals, mainly felines and threatened migratory birds; and
- Strengthen information exchange and sharing of good experiences through creating a subregional network between experts in threatened large mammals, mainly felines, and threatened migratory birds.

8. Upon the conclusion of the Meeting, the final format of a proposal “Nature Conservation Programme in North-East Asia” and its budget plan was submitted to the 10th SOM in November 2004 and approved for the commencement from early 2005.

9. The goal of the project is to assist NEASPEC member countries in undertaking joint action on nature conservation. In order to achieve the goal, the project was designed to develop a subregional conservation strategy and action plan, a common methodology for data collection and management, and activities for awareness-raising. In addition, the project was planned to select target species among feline animals and migratory birds, and to combine in-situ and ex-situ conservation methods so as to formulate a more feasible and effective mechanism for subregional action.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

10. Based on the project concept and its work plan, the Inception Meeting of the project was held in July 2005 in Chuncheon, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Kumkang Nature Reserve, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK). The meeting was attended by government officials and experts of feline animals and migratory birds from China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation. The meeting consisted of two main parts: 1) discussion sessions on the approach and plan of the project; and 2) study tours to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) of Kangwon Province, ROK and the Kumkang Mountain, DPRK's nature reserve.

11. The discussion sessions reviewed past and ongoing subregional nature conservation projects, and focused on how to arrange a project framework which could achieve concrete impact and visibility. The meeting also finalized the selection of target species, the overall direction of the nature conservation strategy and action plan, the approach of database development and data collection, working modalities and collaboration with other organizations.

12. The discussion particularly drew the following conclusions:

- Finalized the selection of six target species on the basis of their significance and commonality in subregional nature conservation. The target species consist of three species of feline animals and three species of migratory birds;
- Agreed to formulate and undertake practical and action-oriented activities as pilot projects, while the project will have a focus on the creation of a subregional strategy and action plan;
- Agreed to compile existing data sets in order to create a database, which will be a basis for subregional action; and
- Agreed to promote active participation of stakeholders including NGOs, academic institutes, and local authorities in the implementation process in order to create more tangible and visible impacts with minimum resources.

13. Since the Inception Meeting, the Secretariat had followed up with national focal points to designate national collaborating centres which would assume the role for providing required national input to develop a database, a subregional conservation strategy and action plan for target species, undertaking relevant national activities and pilot projects if necessary. The nominated centres include Nanjing Institute of Environmental Sciences (NIES), SEPA in China, National Institute of Environmental Research (NIER) in the Republic of Korea, Japan Wildlife Research Center (JWRC) in Japan, and Irbis Mongolia in Mongolia, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the Russian Federation.

14. In addition, Japan Wildlife Research Center, the partner institute for project implementation, has played a key role in analyzing existing relevant conservation strategies and drafting the attached Subregional Conservation Strategy. And National Institute of Environmental Research in the Republic of Korea assumed the responsibility for compiling data from other collaborating centres and developing a web-based database.

15. On the basis of the Inception Meeting's conclusion and progress of the work after the Meeting, the Secretariat in collaboration with Nanjing Institute of Environmental Science organized an Expert Group Meeting on 19-21 December 2005 in Nanjing, China. The Meeting, which was attended by nominated national experts as well as experts from key NGOs and networks working on the target species, aimed to draft key components of the strategy, decide on the mechanism of a database, and identify pilot projects.

16. Having presentations on relevant conservation strategies, existing global databases and proposals for pilot projects, the Expert Group Meeting came to the following conclusions.

- Decided to formulate a subregional conservation strategy in such a way to be built upon existing strategies and recommendations made by NGOs and international networks. The identification was also made with consideration of NEASPEC's conditions and approaches;
- Agreed on the mechanism of a web-based database using the current NEASPEC website, which will be an open-access database for the public with all national languages of NEASPEC member countries, and a portal for additional information and resources related to the target species. The meeting also reaffirmed to request National Institute of Environmental Research of ROK for the creation and operation of the database since the institute currently administrates NEASPEC website;
- Reviewed proposals of pilot projects, but failed to finalize the selection of projects. Considering the time frame of the project implementation, the Secretariat was delegated to finalize the process with additional information that would be submitted by national collaborating centres by the mid January 2006; and
- Agreed on the procedure of project implementation and particularly the roles of collaborating centres in preparing strategy and database, and implementing pilot projects and other relevant national activities. In order to assist in the understanding of the procedure, a generic Letter of Agreement (LOA) was circulated and briefed by the Secretariat.

17. After the Expert Group Meeting, the Secretariat received new or revised proposals for pilot projects, facilitated the exchange of views among national collaborating centres on the proposals and finalized the selection process in March 2006 by accepting the following proposals.

- Managing Protected Areas and Multiple Use lands for Amur Tiger and Far East Leopard Conservation (Requested fund: US\$17,000, Approved fund: US\$13,000)
- Addressing Snow Leopard Trade Issues to Decrease Poaching (Requested fund: US\$14,000, Approved fund: US\$14,000)
- Field Survey Training for Monitoring the Snow Leopard Population (Requested fund: US\$17,000, Approved fund: US\$11,500)
- Training Workshop for Younger Researchers on Conservation of Threatened Birds (Requested fund: US\$40,000, Approved fund: US\$36,500)

18. Upon the decision, ESCAP and each national collaborating centre adopted a LOA to define roles and responsibilities of each party in implementing activities including pilot projects, and at the same time made consultation to fine-tune the implementation plan of the projects. As a result, the pilot projects were undertaken as follows. And more detailed information on the projects is attached as Annex IV.

- International Workshop on Transboundary Amur Tiger Wild Population Restoration, 24-25 July 2006, Yanji, China
- Field Survey Training for Monitoring of Snow Leopard Population, 11-17 October 2006, Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, Mongolia
- International Meeting on the Establishment of Trilateral Cooperation Network towards Reducing Poaching and Trade of Snow Leopard, 14-17 November, 2006, Ulaangom, Mongolia
- Training Workshop for Younger Researchers on Conservation of Cranes and Black-faced Spoonbill in North East Asia, 19-25 November 2006, Izumi and Fukuoka, Japan

19. Meanwhile, a draft of the subregional conservation strategy was prepared by the Secretariat and the Japan Wildlife Research Centre and circulated to the national collaborating centres for the first review.

20. Subsequently, the Review Meeting was held on 19-20 October 2006 in Hustain National Park, Mongolia to finalize the draft strategy, which is attached as Annex II, for the submission to the 12th SOM for its adoption and to review the progress of other project components, i.e. data base and pilot projects in particular.

21. At the Meeting, NIER introduced its plan for the compilation of national data on the target species and the creation of a database, and informed that the work would be undertaken by early 2007 in consultation with JWRC.

III. KEY CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS FROM THE PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

22. The development of a NEASPEC programme on nature conservation was conceived as a key priority area of subregional cooperation from the inception of NEASPEC. However, NEASPEC was not able to commence any relevant activities during the first decade owing to the lack of financial resources.

23. The establishment of the Core Fund in 2001 enabled the NEASPEC countries to initiate the anticipated work on nature conservation. Subsequently, the NEASPEC countries were involved in a series of consultations, resulting in the scope and approach of this project. Thus, this project would be a milestone in the development of NEASPEC as the first NEASPEC project which is fully funded by the member countries. In turn, the outcome of this project needs to have strong supports from the member countries to be meaningful for both NEASPEC and nature conservation in North-East Asia.

24. The draft of the subregional conservation strategy was successfully finalized. As recommended by the SOMs and expert group meetings, the Secretariat, national collaborating centres, national experts and resource persons have made efforts to create synergies with existing strategies and initiatives. In this regard, drafting the Strategy in particular referred to the following strategies which were formulated by expert networks, international organizations or NGOs.

For feline animals

- TumenNET Strategic Action Programme (2002)
- Conservation Action Plan for the Russian Far East Ecoregion Complex: NGO Joint Action Plan (2003)
- Recovery of the Wild Amur Tiger Population in China: Progress and Prospect (2002)
- Conserving Tiger in the Wild - A WWF Framework and Strategy for Action 2002-2010
- Recovery of the Amur Tiger Population in China: Progress and Prospect (2002)
- Snow Leopard Survival Strategy (2003)
- TRAFFIC Report: Fading Footprint – the Killing and Trade of Snow Leopards (2003)
- Strategy for conservation of the Snow Leopard in the Russian Federation (2002)
- Mongolian Snow Leopard Conservation Plan (2000)

For migratory birds

- Cranes: Status Survey and Conservation Action Plan (1996)
- Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy 2001-2005
- Action Plan for the Black-faced Spoonbill (1995)
- Action Plan for the Conservation of Migratory Shorebirds in the East Asian-Australasian

Flyway: 2001-2005

- Action Plan Proposal for the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* in Taiwan (2004)
- Conservation Plan for the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) in Hong Kong (WWF 2001)

25. The aforementioned strategies and initiatives provide very meaningful information on the six target species and guidelines for required action in NEASPEC countries. However, most strategies and initiatives are informal and voluntary arrangements. Thus, the subregional conservation strategy of NEASPEC has a unique status in terms of its formal arrangement and thereby significant potential to create synergies with the existing strategies and initiatives.

26. The project exercised significant roles in building common understanding and network among the key national institutes and stakeholders involved in the conservation of the target species in North-East Asia. In particular, pilot projects acted as an important channel and opportunity for building collective knowledge on the species and networks for further transboundary cooperation on Leopard and Tiger in particular.

27. While the project budget enabled most planned activities to be undertaken, additional in-kind and financial supports for pilot projects were indispensable for the successful implementation. In particular, the training workshops on the survey of snow leopard and migratory birds received invaluable supports from the Government of Japan.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

28. The Meeting may wish to agree upon the draft strategy as the *Nature Conservation Strategy of NEASPEC* by adopting the draft resolution attached as the Annex I.

29. The Meeting may wish to decide upon a number of priority cooperation areas and the intergovernmental mechanism for undertaking activities in the identified areas.

30. The Meeting may wish to request the member countries to advise on specific areas of priority actions for the implementation of the Strategy so that the Secretariat could develop, in consultation with national collaborating centres, a project profile for appropriate follow-up activities for submission to the next SOM.