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**REVIEW OF ISSUES CONCERNING THE INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENT OF
NEASPEC**

(Item 8 of the provisional agenda)

**Overview of the current situation and possible future steps regarding the institutional
arrangement of NEASPEC**

Note by the Secretariat

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I. OVERVIEW OF PROCESS

1. Until mid-2011, ESCAP had acted as an interim secretariat for NEASPEC upon the request from the NEASPEC member States, pending the final decision on the establishment of the permanent (or programme) secretariat. In particular, during 1999-2001 and 2005-2008, respectively, ESCAP facilitated consultations among the member States to finalize the interim arrangement of the secretariat. The consultations also dealt with the modality of financial contributions of member States, the human capacity of the secretariat and the ownership of member countries over NEASPEC.
2. In the course of establishment of new Subregional Offices of ESCAP, member States confirmed the relocation of the secretariat from the ESCAP Headquarters to the ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia (SRO-ENEA). This development was formalized during the following intergovernmental meetings: 1) the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Meeting on the ESCAP Subregional Offices held on 2-4 March 2010 recommended that the SRO-ENEA assists member States in the area of sustainable development including activities carried out under NEASPEC; 2) subsequently, the 15th Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) of NEASPEC held on 17-18 March 2010 reviewed the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Meeting and recommended that the operational functions of the interim Secretariat of NEASPEC should be carried out by the SRO-ENEA; and 3) the 66th ESCAP Commission Session held from 30 April - 19 May 2010 endorsed the report of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Meeting. Also, in response to the decision of the 15th SOM, the Commission noted that the SRO-ENEA would function as the Secretariat of NEASPEC.
3. However, these recommendations and decisions did not refer to the issue of the "interim" nature of the secretariat. Thus, the secretariat continued to hold consultations with the member States with a view of receiving concrete guidance on finalization of the institutional arrangement of NEASPEC. To address this issue, the 67th ESCAP Commission Session held in May 2011 finalized the prolonged consultation process on creating a permanent secretariat with its decision to discontinue the interim nature of the NEASPEC Secretariat and endorsing the SRO-ENEA to function as the secretariat.
4. It is important to note that during the recent years NEASPEC has considerably expanded its scope of work and partnerships with other entities in the subregion. It is anticipated that with the secretariat now based at a dedicated host office (SRO-ENEA), further growth of its activities in the subregion will materialize and NEASPEC will better serve the member States in jointly addressing subregional environmental challenges and supporting national initiatives through this multilateral body.
5. Currently, with strong support of the member States, NEASPEC is actively implementing projects in the following areas: 1) Mitigation of transboundary air pollution from coal-fired power plants; 2) Cooperation mechanisms for nature conservation in transboundary areas; 3) Implementing the regional master plan for the prevention and

control of dust and sandstorms; and is planning to hold a series of activities under Eco-efficiency Partnership during 2011-2012.

6. The considerable expansion of NEASPEC activities became possible due to enhanced interest and participation of member States, improved situation with the human resources since the relocation of the secretariat to SRO-ENEA, and stabilized financial condition with contributions from some member States to the Core Fund as well as the availability of project-based funding.¹

7. However, the effective function of NEASPEC in analyzing subregional challenges, developing joint action, and facilitating the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in implementing joint action require the renewed commitments of member States to financial and institutional support NEASPEC. Firstly, the human resources situation improved recently mostly due to opening of new posts in SRO-ENEA funded from the extra-budgetary sources (contribution of Incheon City to SRO-ENEA). Currently, four staff members consisting of one P-4 (Environmental Affairs Officer), one P-2 (Associate Environmental Affairs Officer), one General Services-6 (Research Assistant) and one consultant are supporting the work of NEASPEC within the environment area of work of SRO-ENEA. However, these staff members except for the consultant are not supposed to exclusively serve NEASPEC as well as environmental area. One immediate option for strengthening the human capacity would be the consideration of member States to second national experts to the secretariat.

8. Secondly, during the most recent years China has been the only member State that sustains the annual contribution to the Core Fund while the Russian Federation started project-based funding through its annual contributions to technical cooperation projects of ESCAP. Now, the new setting of the secretariat that allows close interaction with governments and stakeholders of member States provides a great opportunity to transform NEASPEC to be an effective multilateral environmental mechanism as a catalyst of intra-subregional cooperation among member States as well as a gateway for inter-subregional cooperation for sharing North-East Asia's experiences and policies with other subregions. Thus, member States would consider not only making contributions to the Core Fund but also increasing the amounts of their annual contributions. In addition to that, the member States are invited to make contributions to NEASPEC through mechanisms other than the Core Fund.

9. Thirdly, the Eleventh SOM discussed the need for appointing a chairmanship during interregnum periods of two SOMs in order to provide continual policy guidance to the secretariat in following up the decisions of SOM and increase the ownership of member States over NEASPEC activity. The member countries in principle agreed to have this

¹ China and the Republic of Korea have been contributors for the Core Fund while the ADB and the Russian Federation have provided project-based funding. Japan has made financial contributions to NEASPEC activities implemented by Japanese agencies.

arrangement and to request the host government of SOM to serve as the chair until the next SOM. Thus, the member countries may revisit this decision and decide appropriate tasks and procedures for the chairmanship.

10. Fourthly, benefits of the close proximity of the secretariat to member States could be further enhanced with flexible and streamlined communication channels with national focal points, partner institutions and other relevant stakeholders in member States while each member State requires different modality of communication. In addition, there is a need to clarify the role of embassies of member States in Seoul in communication and consultation between the secretariat and member States. Embassies of member States, notably, Japan, Mongolia and the Russian Federation, have already attended various activities of SRO-ENEA. In this regard, member States may wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the modality of communication with their respective embassies in Seoul.

11. Fifthly, the relocation of the secretariat to SRO-ENEA and the status change from interim to permanent secretariat would substantially increase NEASPEC's interactions with other multilateral bodies and national stakeholders. Under this circumstance, it is necessary for staff members of SRO-ENEA serving the secretariat to have official status as secretariat staff by endorsing the use of titles such as coordinator and secretariat assistant when they represent ESCAP to outside and communicate with member States.

II. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

12. The Meeting may wish to discuss the ways to sustain and strengthen the human capacity of the secretariat by considering, *inter alia*, the following options: 1) funding Junior Professional Officer (JPO) posts from their respective countries through the UN JPO Programme; 2) funding temporary seconded posts from the respective countries.

13. The Meeting may wish to suggest mechanisms to facilitate annual contributions by member States to the Core Fund and/or propose other funding modalities outside the Core Fund.

14. The Meeting may wish to provide the secretariat with guidance on the modality of communication with relevant counterparts in member States.

15. The Meeting may wish to make decisions on appointing a chairmanship during interregnum periods of two SOMs and providing staff of SRO-ENEA serving NEASPEC secretariat with official status as secretariat staff.

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