

Provisional Outline of the Statement/Declaration on Renewed Commitments to NEASPEC

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NEASPEC Secretariat

Background

1. Guided by the Framework and Statement as well as Senior Officials Meeting (SOM), NEASPEC has gradually evolved into a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism in terms of (a) membership covering all six subregional countries; (b) programmatic areas covering air pollution, biodiversity, climate change, land degradation and marine ecosystems; (c) participating stakeholders including governments, local governments, research institutions and civil society organizations; (d) modalities of delivering the work from policy dialogues to field projects; and (e) interlinkages of the work between local, national, (sub)regional and global agendas. The five-year Strategic Plan further helps NEASPEC better define mid-term goals, approaches and sectoral objectives.

2. Member States have underlined the value of a step-by-step and practical approach of NEASPEC that achieved the above-mentioned progress. However, it is time to pursue a leap forward in the work of NEASPEC to address mounting environmental challenges, particularly, associated with climate change, and to support collaboration of member governments and stakeholders for transition towards low carbon and greener development pathways. Most NEASPEC member States require drastic reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to meet the carbon neutrality goals and/or updated Nationally Determined Contributions. Achieving the rapid decarbonization necessitates the full and best utilization of the finance, low carbon technology and innovation from domestic as well as international sources in order to make timely and cost-effective response. Decarbonization also requires a holistic approach to designing socioeconomic policies and infrastructure with consideration of a longer time horizon and multisectoral impact to avoid and minimize possible carbon lock-in effects of society over the next decades.

3. To accelerate achieving the common goals, governments and stakeholders need to cooperate across countries to make the best use of the limited time and resources in analyzing environmental challenges of common interests and developing new knowledge, know-how, technology and policy. As such, cooperative approach to developing and implementing policies

is critical and subregional cooperation is a key building block for the approach. In this connection, NEASPEC as the comprehensive mechanism could expand its function to be a major platform for dialogue and technical cooperation on decarbonization.

4. Meanwhile, the independent evaluation conducted in 2020 recommended reviewing the NEASPEC Framework to enable the full realization of its founding vision to be a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism and updating NEASPEC's long-term vision, mission and goals to align NEASPEC with the ambition and intention of the member States. The SOM-24 in October 2020 reviewed the recommendations and secretariat response of the evaluation and decided to hold a National Focal Points (NFP) meeting to develop and agree on concrete implementation plan for addressing the evaluation recommendations with clear responsibilities and timelines. The NFP Meeting held in May 2021 generally agreed to develop a renewed commitment document while its necessity would be further reviewed and decided at the SOM-25, or in connection with a mid-term review of NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

5. In view of above considerations, the secretariat developed the following provisional outline of the renewed commitment document to help member Governments conceptualize its goal, structure and content, and put forward the position of the governments prior to the SOM-25 so that the SOM reaches a substantive decision.

Provisional outline of the document

I. The context of the renewed commitments

This section could briefly describe the following points. Member governments are invited to share views and suggestions on the points as well as specific issues to be included.

1. **Global context:** Enhanced goals and actions on climate change, green recovery from the pandemic, new global biodiversity targets under the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, accelerated actions for the implementation of the 2030 agenda and SDGs, new commitments from the Stockholm+50, etc.
2. **Subregional context:** Emerging environmental challenges in North-East Asia, increased commitments of member States to global goals and targets, current progress in subregional and multilateral environmental cooperation, etc.
3. **NEASPEC's institutional context:** Progress and challenges in its institutional and programmatic development, directions for fully serving its purpose, etc.

II. Key elements of the renewed commitments

The following paragraphs are prepared reflecting outcomes from the independent evaluation of NEASPEC and subsequent discussions. Member governments may share views on any paragraphs/ points to be revised, included, or deleted.

1. *Having recognized/acknowledged/noted*

- The NEASPEC Framework adopted at the SOM-3 in 1996, defining the goal of the framework as a means to promote subregional environmental cooperation and sustainable development efforts, enhance capacities of the member States in environmental management efforts, and have a step-by-step and practical approach that could be used as building blocks for strengthening subregional cooperation.
- The Vision Statement adopted at the SOM-6 in 2000, recommending to periodically review the environmental conditions and trends as well as the implementation of priority projects in North-East Asia, promote common policy dialogue on approaches and views and coordinated actions on subregional environmental issues and develop the NEASPEC into a comprehensive programme.
- Progress in the development of subregional platforms in thematic areas and tangible cooperation, making NEASPEC towards a comprehensive environmental cooperation mechanism in North-East Asia, that is tailored to the specific subregional characteristics and needs of member States for concerted efforts to improve environmental sustainability.
- Increased commitments of member States to global goals including SDGs, the Paris Agreement, post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, and most notably, the announcement of several member States to achieve carbon neutrality by mid-century, etc., and the need and benefit of subregional cooperation through NEASPEC considering its thematic interlinkages.
- Need of reducing disparities in the capacity of member States in addressing domestic and transboundary environmental challenges to improve the environmental sustainability in the subregion.
- Mid-term goals and approaches of NEASPEC: (a) Enhance science-based, policy-oriented cooperation to address subregional environmental challenges, (b) Mobilize mutual support to manage domestic environmental issues in member States, and (c) Contribute to the implementation of national, regional and global goals for sustainable development, in particular, environment-related SDGs, as stipulated in its Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

2. *Member States agree/ decide/ call on/*

- Make concerted efforts for enhancing the relevance of NEASPEC to the goals and objectives of the Framework, the Vision Statement and the Strategic Plan.
- Consolidate the current work in each programmatic area to enhance tangible contributions to addressing national and subregional challenges and strengthen the linkage between activity outcomes with policy coordination within and between member States.
- Further identify areas and approaches which can be most effectively addressed by NEASPEC and in partnership with national institutions and international platforms.
- Facilitate better utilization of capacities and knowledge in the subregion which could mutually support the member States in addressing the environmental and sustainable development challenges.
- Strengthen NEASPEC's role in facilitating policy dialogue and policy coordination including through holding policy dialogues among member Governments and relevant stakeholders in order to exchange policy information and experience, discuss areas of mutual interest, receive technical support from other member States, and align and accelerate national and subregional progress.
- Effectively link the work of NEASPEC with national agendas and actions pertaining to the implementation of global goals, such as the Paris Agreement, post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency in the work of NEASPEC by scaling up national contributions and streamlining coordination processes in the operation of NEASPEC and thematic platforms.
- Increase the level and composition of delegations to the Senior Officials Meeting in order to maintain the balanced representation between member States and make SOM fully function as the body for policy guidance and project coordination, and a forum for experience sharing, information exchange and consultation pertaining to the promotion of environmental cooperation.
- Increase the participation of member Governments and stakeholders in development and implementation of NEASPEC activities including through proactively leading the work in thematic areas.

- Strengthen the financial modality of NEASPEC to be more reliable and predictable for the efficiency of the programme implementation and more equitable between member States in the spirit of subregional cooperation while noting the principle of the common but differentiated responsibilities.