



MEDIA RELEASE

TWENTY-FOURTH MEETING OF THE SUB-REGIONAL MINISTERIAL STEERING COMMITTEE ON TRANSBOUNDARY HAZE POLLUTION

(24TH MSC)

8 June 2023, Singapore

1. The Twenty-fourth Meeting of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee on Transboundary Haze Pollution (24th MSC) was held on 8 June 2023 in Singapore. The Meeting was attended by Ministers, officials and/or representatives for the environment, for land, forest fires and haze, from Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, and the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN Secretariat, under the Chairpersonship of H.E. Grace Fu, Minister for Sustainability and the Environment, Singapore. The Twenty-fourth Meeting of the Technical Working Group on Transboundary Haze Pollution (24th TWG) preceded the Meeting.

2. The Meeting noted the ASEAN Specialised Meteorological Centre's (ASMC's) weather and smoke haze review, as well as outlook for the southern ASEAN region. Hotspot counts detected in January to May 2023 were around 16% lower than in January to May 2022 for the southern ASEAN region. Based on current climate models, ASMC forecasts a 70-80% chance for El Niño conditions to develop between June to September 2023 and for a positive Indian Ocean Dipole to develop between June and July 2023. Both these climate phenomena would likely result in below normal rainfall for many parts of the southern ASEAN region in the next few months. Alert Level 1 was issued for the southern ASEAN region on 29 May 2023, indicating the start of the dry season. The Meeting further noted ASMC's continuous efforts to improve its products and services in remote sensing, dispersion modelling, sub-seasonal to seasonal prediction and climate change projections modelling, which support fires/haze monitoring, assessment and early warning, as well as weather and climate prediction in the ASEAN region. The ASMC has extended its regional capability building programme to 2027 and conducted an attachment programme for participants from Myanmar and Lao PDR from March to April 2023.

3. The Meeting noted the information presented by the Malaysian Meteorological Department (MET Malaysia) on the refinement of the Southeast Asia Fire Danger Rating System (SEA FDRS) that comprised three elements: (i) increase in the number of weather stations from 264 to 459; (ii) implement new fire danger code for the northern ASEAN sub-region (Fire Weather Index - FWI and Fine Fuel Moisture Code - FFMC); and (iii) simulation of the 7-day forecast. The Meeting noted the refinement development started from 2021 to 2022 and the new element of FDRS was operationalised from 13 January 2023. The Meeting noted that verification of FWI data showed that FDRS 7-day forecast product was reliable and robust to be used by ASEAN Member States. The Meeting supported the initiatives by MET Malaysia and will continue the cooperation and promote the usage of new refinements of SEA FDRS.

4. The Meeting noted that the dry season this year could be more prolonged and intense compared to the past three years when La Niña conditions were present, and that the risk of elevated hotspot activities and transboundary smoke haze occurrence was the highest since 2019. The MSC countries pledged to stay vigilant and intensify their fires monitoring and haze preventive efforts to minimise the occurrence of transboundary smoke haze during drier periods. The MSC countries reaffirmed their readiness to provide assistance such as deployment of technical resources for firefighting assistance on emergency response situation, if requested, and to collaborate among MSC countries with enhanced cooperation and coordination to mitigate land and forest fires, when necessary. The Meeting recognised the effects of climate change, such as more frequent drought and other extreme weather events, and agreed on the importance of taking strong action to improve vigilance, preventive measures, and immediate fire suppression procedures to mitigate land and forest fires and to minimise the occurrence of transboundary haze during periods of drier weather.

5. The Meeting expressed appreciation and commended the various initiatives and actions by MSC countries on the implementation of the Strategic Review of the Sub-Regional Ministerial Steering Committee Programmes and Activities which includes, among others: (i) enhancing haze control management through early warning/monitoring and fire prevention; (ii) building capabilities for fire suppression at the local, national and regional levels; (iii) bilateral collaboration in line with the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP); and (iv) capacity building of ASEAN Member States under the Regional Haze Training Network. The Meeting underscored the coordinated support of ASEAN Centres and relevant agencies in providing data and information relating to land and /or forest fires for ASEAN and ASEAN Member States. The Meeting highlighted that ASEAN's efforts to increase the preparedness for and to mitigate the risks arising from land and/or forest fires require working together with all stakeholders, including strengthening actions at local communities, non-governmental organisations and private companies.

6. The Meeting reaffirmed its commitment towards the full and effective implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution and looked forward to the finalisation of the new Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation (Haze-free Roadmap) 2023-2030 and the new ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy (APMS) 2023-2030 to further strengthening, intensifying, and comprehensively addressing the root causes of transboundary haze pollution and pursue the overall context of sustainable development for the region. The Meeting also looked forward to the finalisation of the Investment Framework for a Haze-free, Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia to prioritise actions on haze reduction and enable predictable funding flows and potential for joint programme and project development among ASEAN Member States and other stakeholders.

7. The Meeting stressed the need to pursue the finalisation of the Establishment Agreement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC) in Indonesia and resume the discussion on the Host Country Agreement for timely finalisation. The Meeting reiterated the call for expeditious establishment and operationalisation of the ACC THPC to facilitate for faster and effective implementation of all aspects of the AATHP.

8. The Meeting reiterated appreciation to ASEAN's external partners for the valued cooperation and support to promote sustainable management of peatlands in the ASEAN region and commended the implementations progress of programmes/projects, namely: Sustainable Use of Peatland and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA) and Measurable Action for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management in Southeast Asia (MAHFSA). The Meeting highlighted the need of continued partnerships with ASEAN Partners and other external parties to facilitate better prevention, monitoring, preparedness, and response to the land and/or forest fires through strengthened local, national and regional cooperation framework.

9. The Meeting looked forward to the convening of the 18th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (COP-18) in August 2023 in Lao PDR.

10. The Meeting expressed their appreciation to the Government of Singapore for hosting the 24th MSC Meeting and the excellent arrangements made. The 25th MSC Meeting will be held in Thailand in 2024.
