

IPBES-2 HIGHLIGHTS WEDNESDAY, 18 APRIL 2012

The second session of the plenary meeting on an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) entered its third day in Panama City, Panama. In the morning, delegates listened to presentations from countries that aspire to host the IPBES secretariat, and considered potential host institutions. At lunch, informal groups met to discuss the IPBES work programme and the membership of regional economic integration organizations. In the afternoon delegates continued to discuss proposed options regarding the structure and composition of subsidiary bodies of the plenary, and met in an evening session to discuss rules of procedure.

BIDS TO HOST IPBES

On Wednesday morning, Chair Watson invited presentations from the five countries bidding to provide the physical location of the IPBES secretariat.

Yeon-chul Yoo, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, presented their bid to host the secretariat in Seoul, saying US\$2 million would be provided annually for the secretariat's operations and US\$1 million for capacity building for the next seven years.

Mohamed Ali, Ministry of Environment and Mineral Resources, said that Kenya has several biodiversity hotspots, and highlighted national and international biodiversity-related institutions hosted in Nairobi. He said Kenya has pledged US\$1 million annually to support the secretariat, and noted that hosting IPBES would be a fitting tribute to the memory of the Nobel Prize Winner Wangari Maathai.

Didier Hoffschir, Ministry of Superior Education and Research, France, underscored France's commitment to biodiversity protection, involvement in MEAs, and in IPBES in particular. She highlighted that Paris is an important international hub, and that France would support IPBES' installation with a grant of US\$500,000 over the first three years, and US\$300,000 towards funding of scientific activities.

Elsa Nickel, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety, Germany, highlighted the advantages of hosting IPBES in Bonn, including the potential to achieve synergies with the 18 other UN organizations located in the city. He said Germany would provide: US\$1.3 million annually to the IPBES' trust fund; US\$850,000 for conferences, travel costs and studies; and US\$6.5 million annually for capacity building activities.

Hem Pande, Ministry of Environment and Forests, India, highlighted India's biodiversity and underscored key characteristics that New Delhi could offer for the

accomplishment of IPBES' functions, including experience in successfully hosting international events, and a central networking hub.

HOST INSTITUTION(S)

Chair Watson called for discussions on the joint proposal submitted by UNEP, UNESCO, FAO and UNDP (UNEP/IPBES. MI/2/6) to host the secretariat. Dan Leskien, FAO, highlighted the comparative advantages of the four UN organizations, their potential role in overseeing the administrative functions of the secretariat, and procedures for the appointment of staff.

MEXICO commended the collaboration, saying this would take advantage of the strengths of the institutions in biodiversity sciences, training and capacity building. COLOMBIA, ETHIOPIA, UGANDA, and KENYA supported UNEP taking a lead role, as the functions of IPBES are aligned to its mandates. SWITZERLAND supported joint management of the secretariat, adding that UNEP's administrative procedure could apply. He also called for more information on accountability, governance, finance and budgeting.

CHILE and THAILAND mentioned the need for more information on staffing. NORWAY called for elaboration on the joint proposal before the next plenary meeting. CHINA said the role on overseeing the work of the secretariat should be left to the plenary. DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, with PERU, cautioned against the formation of multiple subsidiary bodies.

The US proposed that intersessional work be carried out to clarify details of the institutional arrangements. She pointed out that the proposed secretariat was too large, equivalent to that of the IPCC 20 years after its operationalization. She highlighted the need for independence of the secretariat.

BRAZIL requested clarification regarding the management of a proposed trust fund, and on the interaction of UN bodies with the host country. ARGENTINA asked for details on the day to day activities of the agencies, their expected expenditure, overheads and budget for the first year. SOUTH AFRICA said that in light of upcoming discussions on International Environmental Governance in Rio+20, this proposal needs to clarify how IPBES will relate to other MEAs.

NEPAL called for agency presentations to answer questions on the management of the work programme. GUATEMALA, with FIJI, asked for clarification on how the arrangement will affect national level work. EU called for basic operational principles to be adopted in Panama, and called attention to coherence on staff rules related to administrative and financial arrangements, and asked for clarification on monitoring. Ghana, for the AFRICAN GROUP, said identifying governance leadership among the four agencies is important for enhancing productive outcomes. ECUADOR supported having a single agency as host, as opposed to four.

Chair Watson emphasized the need to separate out the joint administrative work of agencies from the additional roles they can play in substantive issues in an IPBES, and suggested the plenary aim to draft an outline for intersessional work. Ibrahim Thiaw, for UNEP, UNESCO, FAO, and UNDP, indicated the agencies involved would address and clarify issues raised for the first plenary of IPBES.

SUBSIDIARY BODY FUNCTIONS AND STRUCTURES

Chair Watson tabled a third option for subsidiary body functions and structures, one with an administrative bureau composed of vice-chairs and one additional participant per UN region, and a multidisciplinary expert panel for scientific and technological functions composed of participants from biogeographical regions, with MEA scientific subsidiary bodies as observers. Delegates then debated the three options: one (one subsidiary body, with an expanded bureau), two (two subsidiary bodies) and three (bureau and expert panel). The US, BRAZIL, CHINA and NORWAY suggested considering the issue of subsidiary bodies and regional representation in separate discussions.

BRAZIL and the EU indicated support for either options two or three, while AUSTRALIA supported either option one or two. NORWAY supported option one, saying it was most cost-effective, as did SWITZERLAND, adding that scientific and administrative matters should be discussed together. COLOMBIA, MEXICO, PERU, the EU, ARGENTINA, INDONESIA, CHILE and CHINA supported option two, while AZERBAIJAN, URUGUAY, KAZAKHSTAN, and NEW ZEALAND supported option three. Ghana, for the AFRICAN GROUP, expressed concern over the selection of the expert panel as presented in the third option and JAPAN underscored the need of a smaller expert panel. Several countries emphasized that the subsidiary body be designed with costs in mind. The EU emphasized the importance of including civil society in the subsidiary body.

On regional representation, countries were also divided on whether to base regional elections on the UN regions or on other criteria, including biogeographical features, IUCN regions, or the CITES regions. BRAZIL proposed involving three regional experts, in biology, social science and policy, per biogeographical region. IUCN clarified their regions are not based solely on biological aspects, and that this system is likely to change soon. PERU, ETHIOPIA, and ARGENTINA emphasized keeping the option open to specify regional groupings at a later date. Chair Watson, agreed to a request from COLOMBIA to provide the plenary information weighing the implications for electing different regional groupings and suggested an informal group discuss the issue at lunch on Thursday.

Delegates discussed: whether the same person should chair both the plenary and the scientific panel; the roles of the vice-chairs, and the composition of the officers. CHILE and NORWAY highlighted that the chair of the scientific panel should have significant scientific expertise, capable of giving scientific and political strength to the expert panel. CANADA countered that the chair of the bureau should be chair of the expert panel as that would give credibility to IPBES. NORWAY opined that the officers of the working groups should also be members of the scientific panel, noting this would have cost implications. Chair Watson also agreed to draft a non-paper for consideration outlining the implications of the different chairing options. Delegates agreed to continue discussions by working off the basis of option two.

RULES OF PROCEDURE

Chair Watson presented the draft text on the rules of procedure for the platform's plenary (UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/CRP.1). CHILE supported prioritizing the rules necessary for the establishment of IPBES and completing them in the intersessional process. BOLIVIA, ARGENTINA and ETHIOPIA opposed, saying rules must be defined before the platform is established. PERU and ARGENTINA, opposed by TURKEY, called for a working group to address the rules of procedures.

The US, supported by NORWAY, CANADA, AUSTRALIA, SWITZERLAND, GHANA, the EU and others, mentioned a set of rules of procedures for initiating discussions, including membership, quorum, credentials and representation. NORWAY called for an expert group to work on these priorities.

On the scope, BOLIVIA called for a footnote indicating their reservation on the concept of "ecosystem services." BRAZIL, with EGYPT and CHILE, suggested this reservation should appear in the report of the meeting, rather than in the rules of procedures. Later, Bolivia introduced "ecosystem services" as a definition.

On the definition of the platform's members, Chair Watson noted that many countries had expressed a preference for the option that defines the platform's members as "UN member states expressing their intent to be members of the platform" rather than "UN member states, its specialized agencies or the International Atomic Energy Agency that have notified the platform's secretariat of their intent to participate in the platform, or regional economic integration organizations." The US suggested replacing UN "member states" by "participants." Eventually, delegates agreed to option two with the EU asking to add and bracket mention of "regional economic integration organizations," pending completion of a definition of that term.

On Wednesday evening, delegates continued to work through the draft rules of procedure, focussing on five areas that remain outstanding due to their linkages to other pending discussions including on: "members of the platform," "regional economic integration organizations," "observers," "Bureau" and "Bureau members" and an extensive debate was held on the definition of "observers."

On dates and venue of each session, delegates accepted the rule, with amendment, that plenary will decide the date and venue rather than platform members. On notification of members of dates and venue, the text remained bracketed, pending clarification of language.

On admission of observers, delegates debated whether to have strict rules to block "inappropriate" observers, or an open system allowing all accredited observers, as with the first and present sessions of the plenary. Delegates also discussed the inclusion of REOs as observers.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As the third day of the meeting stretched late into the night, delegates seemed to be keenly aware of the limited time left to achieve consensus on a number of substantive issues. As one veteran delegate said: "I know it looks ambitious but I trust in the extra time that the remaining two night sessions will provide to agree on all the relevant IPBES arrangements here in Panama." However, other delegates emerging from the plenary room were less optimistic, saying: "it is time that we start considering seriously how to prioritize the essential elements that can realistically be decided by Saturday evening." As the meeting continued on Wednesday night, however, increasingly complex deliberations on "simple" things did not discourage delegates, who encouraged the chair with nods of their heads to work on finding agreement. "There is good energy in the room," said one, "but we've got to be smarter about what we spend time on."