

IPBES-2 HIGHLIGHTS FRIDAY, 20 APRIL 2012

The second session of the plenary meeting on an Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) entered its fifth day in Panama City, Panama. In the morning, delegates met to discuss: interim arrangements for the multi-disciplinary expert panel (MEP) and the rules of procedure. At lunch, informal groups met to discuss legal aspects of establishing the IPBES. In the afternoon and late into the evening, delegates continued to consider the rules of procedure.

INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE MEP

Delegates considered the Chair's proposal on the interim and intersessional arrangements for the MEP, and many countries expressed support. BOLIVIA, opposed by ETHIOPIA, requested a change of text from "the meeting has agreed to establish two subsidiary bodies" to "the meeting has agreed on the structure of two subsidiary bodies." BOLIVIA eventually agreed to the original text under the understanding that this would not prejudice the final outcome on the establishment of IPBES.

PAKISTAN asked to include criteria for selection of the members. SWITZERLAND said specific options for regional structure should not be included in the text, to allow independent decision-making during the intersessional period. Japan, for ASIA PACIFIC, supported by BRAZIL, emphasized a bottom-up approach to intersessional discussions to ensure regional and sub-regional considerations of regionalization.

Japan, for ASIA PACIFIC, COLOMBIA, NORWAY, the EU, CHINA, and others, agreed to having an interim arrangement on regional representation. The EU called for the inclusion of civil society.

ARGENTINA preferred to keep discussion on the regional options "very broad" and called for further guidelines in the rules of procedure. ETHIOPIA preferred to avoid vague expressions, such as "biodiversity measures," and proposed leaving development of criteria to experts in the MEP. GHANA underscored the importance of geographic vulnerability to biodiversity change, proposing that a mathematical formula weighing different biodiversity criteria be a component to decisions on regions.

Regarding the composition of the bureau, CHINA, supported by the US, said sharing the chair and vice-chairs with the MEP remained contentious. The US added that the MEP can

function well without the vice-chair of the bureau, but expressed flexibility. BRAZIL preferred that chairs participate as observers to the MEP. The text on "the chair and four vice-chairs would also be members of the MEP" remain in brackets at China's request.

NORWAY proposed: inserting text related to membership and the interim arrangements for the MEP; using criteria already agreed upon for the selection of the chair and the four vice-chairs; and having the same chair for the bureau and the MEP. CHINA stressed regional balance and between developed and developing countries, noting that many biodiversity-rich areas are in developing countries, and that these countries also need capacity building.

On denomination and election for the experts and members of the bureau, SWITZERLAND suggested including a placeholder referring to conflict of interests of experts to consider the issue in the future as a means to ensure the full credibility of the IPBES.

MEXICO, supported by BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, PERU and TURKEY, proposed prioritizing engagement with MEAs specifically related to biodiversity, while NORWAY, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC and others, suggested keeping it open to include UNFCCC, UNCCD and other MEAs. SWITZERLAND suggested engaging the IPCC. The Ramsar Secretariat suggested referring explicitly to the mentioned MEAs, including the six biodiversity-related conventions and the two Rio conventions: UNFCCC and UNCCD. TURKEY urged inclusion of all relevant stakeholders, including in intersessional meetings.

In the afternoon, the Chair presented draft text on interim and intersessional arrangements for the MEP. The proposed arrangement provided: a description of the interim membership requirements to the MEP; that the arrangement would advise on and facilitate the work programme of IPBES; and possible scenarios for an IPBES work programme (UNEP/IPBES. MI/2/INF.3). MEXICO, NORWAY and the US noted that the document lacked details on assessments, capacity building and other deliverables.

On the proposal for intersessional work of the MEP, delegates agreed that the intersessional process would: be undertaken with broad participation from the scientific and policy community and knowledge holders; emphasize balanced representation of developed and developing countries and economies in transition; and elaborate on how the MEP would be permanently structured. They further agreed that the intersessional work should be brought back to the next plenary for consideration.

RULES OF PROCEDURE

The Chair proposed to identify and agree upon a subset of the rules of procedure required for the operation of IPBES' first meeting. GHANA, JAPAN, MEXICO, BRAZIL and GUATEMALA agreed with this suggestion. The US cautioned that some rules, such as on membership and decision making, need to be considered on a long-term basis.

Chair Watson suggested text for definition of regional economic integration organizations (REIOs). The EU requested time for consideration, and Ghana, for the AFRICAN GROUP, opposed, saying this should be considered in plenary. On observers, on text that includes indigenous peoples and local communities, the US, opposed by BOLIVIA, suggested that this refer to "organizations of indigenous peoples and local communities."

On definitions, text was agreed on the bureau and the bureau member. FIJI, supported by INDIA and AUSTRALIA, expressed concern that the definition of "ecosystem services" was anthropocentric. Mexico, for GRULAC, proposed an elaborated definition, based on the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, adding: "the benefits people obtain from provisioning services such as food, water, timber, and fiber; regulating services, such as regulation of climate, floods, disease, wastes, and water quality; cultural services such as recreation, aesthetic enjoyment and spiritual fulfillment; and supporting services such as soil formation, photosynthesis, and nutrient cycling." The US and CHINA preferred finding a new location for this language in the document. Delegates eventually agreed on the definition of ecosystem services, but the text remained in brackets pending consultations to find a new location for the definition in the text. Delegates agreed on the rule of procedure dealing with credentials of representatives with minor amendments introduced by the US.

In the evening, Chair Watson introduced the text on rules of procedure produced by an informal working group of lawyers that met in parallel to the morning and afternoon sessions. Regarding officers and operations of the bureau, delegates agreed to procedures for nominating bureau members, including the chair, four vice-chairs, five other officers and alternates and their election by the plenary but retained brackets on language related to terms of office.

Delegates approved the following rules with minor amendments: on bureau meetings to advise the Chair and secretariat on the conduct of business of plenary and subsidiary bodies; on powers conferred to the chair of the bureau; rules for election of bureau members and nominations of the members for election into the bureau.

Delegates agreed on criteria and expertise required for the chair and the vice-chairs, as well as addressed the process for invitations by the members of the platform of written nominations on behalf of regions. MEXICO questioned whether nominations should be on behalf of regions, as the region may not be able to agree on a candidate. AUSTRALIA suggested replacing "on behalf of regions" by "in accordance with rule 16." MEXICO suggested this be connected to an amendment in the rule 16, that deals with candidates for the bureau proposed by governments for nomination by regions and election by the plenary, by adding that "in the event that a region cannot agree

on their nomination the plenary will decide." US supported also considering nominations from the floor. Discussions continued late into the night.

INTERSESSIONAL WORK PROGRAMME:

In the afternoon, delegates considered a draft of possible intersessional work prepared by the secretariat, which highlighted work on assessment of assessments, conceptual framework and capacity building activities.

On the assessment of assessments, Chair Watson suggested that the title read "catalogue of assessments." CHILE, supported by the EU, said that this catalogue should be prepared within six months rather than the two years suggested in the text. CHILE, with BOLIVIA, ETHIOPIA, the EU, PERU, and the US emphasized the need for identification of knowledge gaps. BOLIVIA called for including traditional and local knowledge in the catalogue.

On capacity building, ETHIOPIA said gaps in capacity building should be identified by the MEP. Chair Watson replied that the MEP would not be constituted until the first plenary meeting of IPBES. CHILE, with the US, suggested preparing a catalogue of existing activities and capacity-building needs. JAPAN preferred the work programme be discussed in the MEP and suggested intersessional work on assessment of assessments under the coordination of the interim secretariat. The EU highlighted organizing periodic meetings on conventions of donors, exploring potential partnerships; and that the secretariat compile information for the first IPBES plenary. COLOMBIA suggested identifying implications in terms of capacity building demand and supply. BOLIVIA asked the secretariat to outline the different training networks or countries with the capacity to provide trainings for those countries that require it. FIJI highlighted: communication, including a data portal and developing access to those without internet; and a need to integrate IPBES' work into formal education and curricula in developing countries. PERU said working with the secretariats of the Rio Conventions needed mention in the work programme and stressed forming partnerships. The US also prioritized assessing existing capacities and future needs, and underlined integration. SOUTH AFRICA suggested using the document on work programme scenarios (UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/INF.3) to inform intersessionals. Chair Watson stressed intersessional work should identify priority activities and the type of funding that they require.

IN THE CORRIDORS

At the start of an ambitious evening session, Chair Watson informed plenary that depending on the outcome of the session, he would either wear a "sad" tie, or a "happy" tie on the last day of the meeting. A number of delegates have remarked upon the Chair's "energetic presence" and there seems to be appreciation for his "persistent" style, though some have concerns over whether the man actually sleeps. Yet all of this does not necessarily guarantee a successful outcome. One weary delegate commented that "there is a clear consensus to establish an IPBES, but there remains disagreement over what must be defined before its establishment, versus during the intersessional period." Based on the outcome of tonight's negotiations, what is the likelihood of completion? Only tie will tell.