

Summary of the 24th Meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity: May-June 2021

After a year's delay due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the 24th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-24) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) convened to advance the preparations for the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP15), currently scheduled to take place in October 2021 in Kunming, China. Adoption of final draft decision documents was deferred until SBSTTA-24 can resume in person.

SBSTTA-24 built on the work of its informal meeting in February 2021, where participants had the opportunity to comment on most of the SBSTTA-24 agenda items, including:

- the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF);
- synthetic biology;
- risk assessment and risk management of living modified organisms (LMOs);
- marine and coastal biodiversity;
- biodiversity and agriculture;
- the programme of work of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES);
- biodiversity and health; and
- invasive alien species.

Each agenda item was first presented in plenary. The formal first reading took into account and built upon the statements and submissions made at the informal meeting. Following the first reading, contact groups were established on the GBF, marine and coastal biodiversity, risk assessment, and synthetic biology, the latter along with a Friends of the Chair group on new and emerging issues and another Friends of the Chair Group on invasive alien species. These groups met virtually between plenary sessions to negotiate based on non-papers and conference room papers (CRPs). A contact group on biodiversity and health was also established to meet at the resumed in-person SBSTTA-24 meeting. Priority was given to items directly related to the GBF since they needed to be completed early to inform development of the first draft of the GBF and be ready for the third meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the GBF (WG), scheduled for August 2021.

SBSTTA-24 plenary meetings took place virtually on 3-4 May, 23-26 May, and 7-9 June 2021, with contact groups convening in between the plenary sessions. Over 1400 delegates registered for the meeting, with representation of 127 parties and non-parties and representatives from more than 200 intergovernmental organizations, Major Groups, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A Brief History of the Convention on Biological Diversity

The CBD was adopted on 22 May 1992 and opened for signature on 5 June 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (the Rio "Earth Summit"). The CBD entered

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into force on 29 December 1993. There are currently 196 parties to the Convention, which aims to promote the conservation of biodiversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. The COP is the governing body of the Convention, and there are currently four bodies meeting intersessionally: SBSTTA; the Working Group on Article 8(j) and Related Provisions; the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI); and the Open-ended Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF WG).

Key Turning Points

Three protocols have been adopted under the Convention. The Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (January 2000) addresses the safe transfer, handling, and use of LMOs that may have adverse effects on biodiversity, taking into account human health, with a specific focus on transboundary movements. It entered into force on 11 September 2003 and currently has 171 parties. The Nagoya-Kuala Lumpur Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (October 2010) provides for international rules and procedures on liability and redress for damage to biodiversity resulting from LMOs. It entered into force on 5 March 2018 and currently has 48 parties. The Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing (October 2010) sets out an international framework for the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and technologies, and by appropriate funding, thereby contributing to the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of its components. It entered into force on 12 October 2014 and currently has 129 parties.

Other major decisions have included:

- the Jakarta Mandate on marine and coastal biodiversity (COP 2, November 1995, Jakarta, Indonesia);
- work programmes on agricultural and forest biodiversity (COP 3, November 1996, Buenos Aires, Argentina);
- the Global Taxonomy Initiative (COP 4, May 1998, Bratislava, Slovakia);
- work programmes on Article 8(j), dry and sub-humid lands, and incentive measures (COP 5, May 2000, Nairobi, Kenya);
- the Bonn Guidelines on Access and Benefit-sharing and the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (COP 6, April 2002, The Hague, the Netherlands);
- work programmes on mountain biodiversity, protected areas, and technology transfer, the Akwé: Kon Guidelines for cultural, environmental, and social impact assessments, and the Addis Ababa Principles and Guidelines for sustainable use (COP 7, February 2004, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia);
- a work programme on island biodiversity (COP 8, March 2006, Curitiba, Brazil);
- a resource mobilization strategy, and scientific criteria and guidance for marine areas in need of protection (COP 9, May 2008, Bonn, Germany);
- the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, including the Aichi Targets, and a decision on activities and indicators for the implementation of the resource mobilization strategy (COP 10, October 2010, Nagoya, Japan);

- an interim target of doubling biodiversity-related international financial resource flows to developing countries by 2015, and at least maintaining this level until 2020, coupled with targets aiming to improve the robustness of baseline information (COP 11, October 2012, Hyderabad, India); and
- a plan of action on customary sustainable use of biodiversity as well as the “Pyeongchang Roadmap,” a package of decisions on resource mobilization, capacity building, and scientific and technical cooperation linking biodiversity and poverty eradication, and monitoring implementation of the Strategic Plan (COP 12, October 2014, Pyeongchang, South Korea).

Recent Meetings

COP 13 (December 2016, Cancún, Mexico) considered: issues related to operations of the Convention, including integration among the Convention and its Protocols; progress towards implementation of the Strategic Plan and the achievement of the Aichi Targets, and related means of implementation; strategic actions to enhance the implementation of the Strategic Plan and achievement of the Aichi Targets, including with respect to mainstreaming biodiversity within and across sectors, particularly in agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and forestry; and biodiversity and human health interlinkages. It also launched consideration of a series of items on emerging technologies, including synthetic biology, gene drives, and digital sequence information (DSI).

COP 14 (November 2018, Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt) set up an intersessional working group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), and established an intersessional process, including an *Ad Hoc* Technical Expert Group (AHTEG) to continue work on DSI on genetic resources under the Convention and the Nagoya Protocol. COP14 further adopted the Rutzolijirisaxik voluntary guidelines for the repatriation of traditional knowledge relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity as well as voluntary guidelines and guidance: on the integration of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures into wider landscapes and seascapes; on effective governance models for management of protected areas, including equity; for the design and effective implementation of ecosystem-based approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction; for a sustainable wild meat sector; and for avoiding unintentional introductions of invasive alien species associated with trade in live organisms.

The virtual informal meeting in the lead-up to SBSTTA-24 (February 2021) heard brief statements on most SBSTTA-24 agenda items. Since it was an informal meeting, no negotiations took place and no conference room papers were prepared. Throughout the session, many delegates raised issues for to be included in the GBF. Specific discussions focused on the monitoring framework. Two other issues were discussed in detail were synthetic biology, and marine and coastal biodiversity.

The virtual informal meeting in the lead-up to SBI-3 (March 2021) considered most of the SBI-3 agenda items through brief statements by parties and observers. Participants raised several concerns regarding the means of implementation of the GBF, with discussions focusing on the need for ensuring adequate resource mobilization and capacity development, cooperation, knowledge management, and communication.

Report of the Meeting

On Monday, 3 May, SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benitez opened the meeting and led a moment of silence in memory of those whose lives have been lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On behalf of the COP14 Presidency, Hamdallah Zedan (Egypt) expressed hope that states will make collective progress towards adopting an ambitious and transformative GBF. CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Maruma Mrema welcomed everyone's active participation in the discussions, including to ensure that scientific and technical advice informs the development of updated goals and targets, indicators, and baselines for the GBF.

Organizational Matters

Chair Benitez, noting the current online format does not set a precedent for future CBD meetings, explained that all plenary statements from the February 2021 informal sessions in preparation for SBSTTA-24 will be taken into account when preparing conference room papers (CRPs). He therefore urged participants to only raise additional issues in plenary. He also said the adoption of final documents will be deferred to an in-person SBSTTA meeting back-to-back either with the GBF WG or COP15.

Chair Benitez explained that the agenda item on the GBF will be prioritized and addressed early in the meeting since it needs to be completed early to be ready for preparation of documents and consideration by the third meeting of the GBF WG in August. He said the agenda item on health and biodiversity would be deferred to the SBSTTA-24 plenary sessions in June.

Delegates adopted the agenda and organization of work (CBD/SBSTTA/24/1/1 and Add.1). Delegates elected SBSTTA Bureau Member Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina) as Rapporteur for the meeting.

Regarding the election of SBSTTA Bureau members, the Secretariat explained that the SBSTTA Chair had been elected to serve until COP15 when a new Chair would be selected, and indicated that due to staggered terms, four new Bureau members would have to be elected after this SBSTTA meeting. Chair Benitez asked the respective regions to consult on nominations and suggested to defer the elections to an in-person meeting.

Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework

On Monday, 3 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant documents (CBD/SBSTTA/24/2; CBD/SBSTTA/24/3, Add.1, and Add.2/Rev.1). Chair Benitez provided an update on the second consultation workshop of biodiversity related Conventions on the GBF and referred to the report of the meeting (CBD/SBSTTA/24/INF/27).

Argentina, on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group (GRULAC), stressed the importance of a balanced approach when developing the GBF, including addressing the new challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Supported by IRAN, he expressed concern that some indicators may be too complex to enable adequate measurement, and highlighted the importance of strengthening capacity building across regions. INDONESIA pointed out how the pandemic has affected progress on biodiversity conservation and that implementation of the GBF requires economic stability, which is expected to take two to three years, recommending keeping current indicators open for discussion after COP15. CUBA said indicators should take into account national circumstances, and stressed

the need for international solidarity to address the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis.

South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, stated that the GBF discussions should take into account issues of DSI, stressing that this should not be considered in isolation. COSTA RICA, FRANCE, and FINLAND stressed the importance of highlighting the contributions and key role of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in achieving biodiversity outcomes, and to support their work at the national and local level.

A number of parties indicated that they had joined the high ambition coalition to protect at least 30% of the world's land and oceans. FRANCE stressed that the 30% goal should not be a maximum target, and encouraged parties to try to exceed this number and ensure that there are enough protected areas to address biodiversity threats. With regard to related targets, MALDIVES and PORTUGAL asked for protection of marine biodiversity to be better reflected in the draft text. MALDIVES also highlighted the need for indicators on marine and coastal biodiversity, including one on coral reefs. PORTUGAL, COSTA RICA, and the UK asked for better compilation of information on marine biodiversity. ARMENIA stressed the importance of appropriate management of protected areas, and sustainable financing. With regard to the goal on protected areas, JORDAN stated that several of the proposed indicators need further clarification to ensure adequate measurement and reporting.

BANGLADESH stressed that indicators must be easy to measure progress on, and to communicate at the policy level. BRAZIL asked for more careful consideration of baseline dates, suggesting greater use of pre-industrial baselines to better reflect historical biodiversity loss.

MEXICO, supported by SWITZERLAND, proposed that SBSTTA focus on discussing headline indicators so that these can be adopted at COP15 as part of the GBF. NORWAY said that having indicators included for national reporting was a priority and recommended a further peer review process to make progress in the lead up to COP15. ARGENTINA recommended focusing on finalizing indicators, rather than the monitoring framework. MALAYSIA supported having headline indicators and others that are time-bound and can be flexibly used by parties, including some on DSI and pollination. BELGIUM urged addressing urban issues, land use change, illegal and unsustainable harvesting of wildlife, and nature-based solutions.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA requested selecting one headline indicator for each goal and target, and clarify their relationship with supplementary indicators. SPAIN stated that the headline indicators needed more work, proposing the addition of, among others, indicators on urban biodiversity, circular economy, and biodiversity in built up areas. COLOMBIA indicated support for adoption of headline indicators, suggesting that these should be linked to national reporting, while proposing that others should not. JAPAN, supported by UGANDA, proposed that the number of headline and component indicators should be reduced to ensure adequate and efficient tracking of progress in national reports.

Calling for a more substantive analysis and a more critical scientific and technical assessment of the monitoring framework, CANADA suggested making focused changes and submitting them to the Co-Chairs of the GBF WG for information, while focusing SBSTTA-24 discussions on indicators.

Monitoring: A number of delegates indicated concern with the late tabling of the revised version of the document on the monitoring framework (CBD/SBSTTA/24/3/Add.2/Rev.1). Chair Benitez explained that the document contains much of the same structure and information as the previously posted document, and that most of the additions are based on the peer review.

SWEDEN said that it is not clear how the goals and targets are aligned with broader CBD objectives and the 2050 vision, and if they adequately address threats to biodiversity. MOROCCO welcomed the proposed approach for the GBF monitoring framework and requested capacity building for development of data systems. The European Union (EU) supported establishing an AHTEG to advise on the further operationalization of the monitoring framework, with BELGIUM recommending that this follow adoption of the monitoring framework as an annex at COP15. The AFRICAN GROUP also supported the proposed establishment of an AHTEG, following careful consideration of its terms of reference. Along with BRAZIL, he cautioned against burdening developing countries with additional onerous reporting obligations beyond their capacities. ECUADOR noted that several goals and targets currently pose challenges for effective monitoring and reporting, and asked for clarification on methodologies. Supported by UGANDA, he also stressed the importance of ensuring adequate resource sharing and capacity building in compliance with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

Chair Benitez established a contact group on the GBF, co-chaired by Anne Teller (EU) and Jorge Murillo (Colombia). The contact group initially considered goals and targets, for which a Co-Chairs' text was developed, and the monitoring framework. It held a total of five meetings between 5-11 May, along with a Friends of the Co-Chairs' meeting to discuss baselines.

Global Biodiversity Outlook CRP: On Tuesday, 25 May, Chair Benitez opened discussions of the CRPs related to the GBF (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.1 and CRP.3). Chair Benitez reiterated that this session of SBSTTA will only approve CRPs and that L documents will only be approved at an in-person session, as agreed by the SBSTTA and COP Bureaus. He noted that this will possibly happen back-to-back with COP15, hence recommendations to SBSTTA have been removed since they are no longer practical. He also reminded delegates of the brief period of time between this meeting and the next meeting of the GBF WG and the need to submit documents to them.

The CRP on the Global Biodiversity Outlook (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.1) contains a draft recommendation, advising the COP on its response to the publication of the fifth edition of the Global Biodiversity Outlook (GBO 5) and its summary for policymakers, as well as the second edition of the Local Biodiversity Outlooks, and the 2020 Plant Conservation Report. It contains reference to some of the general conclusions of the GBO 5, as well as the lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan identified in the report. Discussions focused on whether COP would "welcome" or "take note of" the report, and the identification of only some of the general conclusions of the report.

BRAZIL expressed concerns about references to subsidies harmful to biodiversity that name specific national programmes that should not be considered subsidies. He asked for the removal of all references to GBO 5. Noting that this is an important piece of work that went through several rounds of peer review, the UK, supported

by CANADA, MEXICO, and the EU, asked to retain the opening paragraph welcoming GBO 5. Chair Benitez asked Brazil if they could keep the references and include a footnote instead. BRAZIL declined and asked to keep the CRP in brackets to avoid prolonged discussions. The Secretariat indicated that a large number of parties had used the chat function to express their support to maintain wording to welcome GBO 5, including Portugal, Peru, Chile, Costa Rica, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Germany, Mexico, Georgia, Australia, Israel, Monaco, Spain, Palau, and others. BRAZIL proposed as a compromise to "take note" rather than "welcome" GBO 5. Noting the overwhelming support, NORWAY, supported by the UK and COLOMBIA, insisted on keeping "welcome" and suggested in cases where one party had concerns it should be noted in a footnote. BRAZIL pointed out that they were ready to accept "take note" as a compromise alongside the final paragraph that encourages the use of GBO 5. Chair Benitez said that "take note" and "welcome" would be kept in brackets.

Delegates then discussed a paragraph listing certain general conclusions of GBO 5. Regarding a provision that biodiversity is critical to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in turn, is crucial to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, PORTUGAL and the UK proposed stating "contribute" rather than "is crucial." ARGENTINA asked for recognition that biodiversity contributes to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, and vice versa, and proposed edited text to reflect this. CANADA, supported by the UK, asked for the text to better reflect the wording of the GBO 5, suggesting the addition of "and full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement and other environmental agreements." ARGENTINA, supported by UGANDA, questioned the procedure of using text directly from GBO 5, given that this was not a negotiated text and should not necessarily form the basis of a COP decision.

Following long discussions about detailed provisions listing certain general conclusions of GBO 5, Chair Benitez proposed to just maintain a general reference and to delete the detailed list. SOUTH AFRICA, NEW ZEALAND, MOROCCO, and CHINA supported this approach. SWEDEN expressed concern about taking away the key messages, yet agreed to move on. Delegates used the same approach for reference to lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, deleting detailed examples.

Delegates then approved the CRP with the above brackets and Chair Benitez noted that this constituted the first CRP adopted by SBSTTA following virtual negotiations.

Global Biodiversity Framework Contact Group Report: Chair Benitez then invited Anne Teller, Co-Chair of the contact group on the GBF to report on the five sessions between 5-11 May 2021. She noted that the contact group faced the big task to provide scientific and technical advice on the GBF goals and targets. To do this, they compiled a report titled "Co-Chairs text on item 3," which was then appended to the report of the first part of the SBSTTA meeting. It contains a preliminary analysis on the results of an online survey (CBD/SBSTTA/24/INF/29) to collect feedback from parties and observer representatives on the applicability and usability of each of the headline indicators, as well as the interventions at the informal and formal SBSTTA meetings and the discussions in the contact group.

She said the Co-Chairs' text is their best attempt to capture the diverse range of views, and emphasized that this text was not negotiated.

Chair Benitez asked for a mandate as SBSTTA Chair to transfer the Co-Chairs' text to the Co-Chairs of the GBF WG and urged parties to refrain from making text proposals given that this does not constitute negotiated text, and to instead raise substantive issues at the next session of the GBF WG. Many parties welcomed the document and thanked the Co-Chairs for providing a balanced view of the positions of both parties and observers. With regard to the survey, ARGENTINA, supported by COLOMBIA, asked for the Co-Chairs to differentiate between the responses "yes" and "yes with work" on the proposed indicators, instead suggesting that future surveys reflect "yes" or "no" responses. DENMARK invited the Co-Chairs of the Contact Group to give a "fuller picture" of the responses to the survey, including responses to each proposed indicator. SWEDEN noted that the text is too general for scientific and technical analysis and asked the Co-Chairs to also consider written statements by parties and observers.

Chair Benitez thanked parties for their comments, and said he would convey the Co-Chairs' text to the Co-Chairs of the GBF WG, along with the annex and the information document containing the full results of the survey, including statements of parties and observers.

Updated Goals and Targets CRP: Delegates then considered the CRP on the review of the updated goals and targets, and related indicators and baselines for the GBF (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.3), prepared following discussions in the contact group.

The CRP on the scientific and technical information to support the review of the updated goals and targets, and related indicators and baselines contains a draft recommendation with provisions on, *inter alia*, the relevant baselines for the reporting and monitoring of progress in the implementation of the GBF and the elements of the review of the monitoring framework, with both topics discussed in the contact group, with the issues of baselines discussed in the Friends of the Co-Chairs group. It also contains an annex on the terms of reference for an AHTEG on indicators for the GBF, which was also discussed in the contact group. Discussions during plenary focused on these issues, with many provisions remaining in brackets as set out below.

Discussion focused on the relevant baselines, as well as the timing for developing and adopting the monitoring framework to oversee GBF implementation and other implementation provisions.

ARGENTINA proposed putting the paragraph on the monitoring framework in brackets, noting that its adoption is conditional on the negotiation of final text. Regarding the paragraph on baselines, SWEDEN, supported by COLOMBIA, and opposed by ARGENTINA, proposed deleting reference to "different responsibilities," stating that he did believe all parties should use the same baselines. MOROCCO proposed retaining references to historical trends and "including available information on the pre-industrial period." MEXICO supported Malaysia and Colombia's suggestions to remove the square brackets on historical trends and delete reference to available information on pre-industrial periods. The UK, opposed by BRAZIL, asked to lift brackets around the reference period of 2011-2020. Chair Benitez tried to remove brackets by using the period of 2011-2020 where data is available as the reference period, while also taking into account historical trends,

rather than losses, and including where available, information on the pre-industrial period. FRANCE expressed concerns and SWITZERLAND opposed a reference to the pre-industrial period and UGANDA asked to keep it and instead bracket the 2011 to 2020 period, while maintaining reference to different responsibilities. Contact Group Co-Chair Teller indicated that this issue was extensively debated in the contact group and in a Friends of the Co-Chairs group, and that it did not seem like the brackets could be easily lifted. All the brackets were maintained.

Delegates started discussing options for a paragraph about keeping the monitoring framework under review, with the UK pointing to a later paragraph about an AHTEG with a time-bound mandate until COP16 as mapping the way for future steps. Chair Benitez made an alternative proposal referencing a scientific and technical review of the monitoring framework, as appropriate, by SBSTTA for subsequent consideration by the COP, which would thereafter keep the monitoring framework under review. MOROCCO supported the Chair's proposal, noting that it was simple, clear, precise, and concise, with BELGIUM, supported by MEXICO and COLOMBIA, proposing the removal of "as appropriate."

MEXICO expressed concern at the open-ended wording on the period of review, suggesting clarification that the review after the headline indicators are adopted would only consider additional components and complements. SWITZERLAND agreed, stressing that the reviews should be based on the work of the SBI and relevant bodies, to be assessed by the COP. The UK, supported by UGANDA, proposed clarifying SBSTTA's mandate to undertake the review, with the role of the COP to consider and review it. SWEDEN added that the monitoring framework should "remain open to future review." NORWAY proposed the addition of "and thereafter keep the monitoring framework under review," with ARGENTINA asking for this to be done "as appropriate." UGANDA urged removing overlap between the roles of SBSTTA, the AHTEG, and the COP. SOUTH AFRICA asked for the removal of the reference to "scientific and technical review," noting that there will be parts of the review that are not scientific and technical. Delegates agreed to the paragraph reading, "Decides to consider a review of the monitoring framework in order to finish its development at COP16 and thereafter keep the monitoring framework under review, as appropriate."

CANADA suggested that the paragraphs on the implementation of the GBF would be better placed within text by SBI, with ARGENTINA and MEXICO pointing out that their substance was already being discussed at the SBI meetings. In response, some parties suggested deleting the related paragraphs. SWITZERLAND insisted on keeping the paragraph on national reporting, with SWEDEN preferring to keep all paragraphs, requesting the ability to add text to the list of component and complementary indicators.

Chair Benitez asked delegates not to reopen text already discussed in the contact group. He indicated that all proposed insertions or deletions would be put in brackets. Regarding the paragraph on headline indicators, SWITZERLAND asked to indicate that parties "will" use them "if applicable" rather than "should" use them. BRAZIL asked to make their use subject to the provision of financial resources, in accordance with CBD Article 20. COLOMBIA, supported by UGANDA, asked to add encouragement of the establishment of mechanisms to build capacity in developing

countries. NORWAY pointed out that these points are best addressed by the SBI, but agreed to retain them in brackets. ARGENTINA asked to indicate that national monitoring be undertaken, as appropriate, and according to national priorities and circumstances.

Regarding the provision on aligning national monitoring, UGANDA asked to make this a more active invitation to parties. Regarding the provision on supporting national and global monitoring systems, ARGENTINA asked to “urge” rather than “encourage” parties, pursuant to CBD Article 20 on financial resources. BELGIUM opposed that reference. COLOMBIA and SWEDEN discussed an invitation to members of international organizations to be part of the AHTEG. This reference, like all other changes, was put in brackets. CANADA asked for a specific reference to IPBES. The UK proposed an additional paragraph requesting SBSTTA to review the AHTEG’s outcomes and complete the scientific and technical review of the monitoring framework and report their findings for subsequent consideration by the SBI and COP16. BRAZIL proposed to request the Secretariat, subject to availability of financial resources, to moderate open online discussions on the monitoring framework, with PORTUGAL adding that this should be done in collaboration with the AHTEG. SWEDEN asked to include a provision requesting the Working Group on Article 8(j) to continue the development and operationalization of indicators related to traditional knowledge and report on this work to the parties, and for the Secretariat to make information available to the AHTEG and other relevant working groups. Some delegates asked to refer to capacity building while acknowledging that the SBI was discussing whether to refer to developing capacity instead; others asked to refer to technology transfer. All proposed deletions or additions remain in brackets.

Delegates then discussed the annexed terms of reference for the AHTEG on indicators for the GBF. Contact Group Co-Chair Teller noted that this had been heavily discussed during the contact group meetings, and urged parties to not reopen the text. Chair Benitez proposed to put brackets around the annex and present it as a package, noting that text can still be added at the next stage of discussions. The CRP was then adopted with a number of brackets in the recommendation and around the annex.

Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

On Tuesday, 4 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/6), which contains annexes with options for modifying the descriptions of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), and describing new areas.

Many delegates supported the protection of 30% of oceans and greater efforts to safeguard marine biodiversity. PERU stressed the importance of integrated coastal zone management. FRANCE urged enhanced consideration of deep seabed mining, underwater noise, marine debris, and biodiversity mainstreaming in fisheries, including through cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). MALDIVES and BANGLADESH asked for more capacity-building initiatives, and increased knowledge and information-sharing opportunities to support developing and small island developing states as important stewards of marine and coastal biodiversity. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA fully supported the Sustainable Ocean Initiative and its ongoing work. IRAN asked for efforts to ensure microplastic reduction and addressing other anthropogenic effects.

SWEDEN stressed the importance of effective and equitable management and governance in the protection of marine and coastal ecosystems. CHILE urged parties to move from voluntary commitments to ambitious action. COLOMBIA stated that SBSTTA should not only focus on the modification of EBSA descriptions, but also provide advice to the parties on the importance of marine and coastal biodiversity to the GBF. DENMARK asked to include marine litter in the GBF in line with ongoing work by the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) and urged separate draft recommendations on marine biodiversity and EBSAs.

BELGIUM supported a two-pronged approach where EBSAs can be registered in the EBSA repository based on a COP decision or directly by a state through the information sharing mechanism in line with respect for national sovereignty. PERU welcomed progress on the options to modify EBSAs and said the description of new ones should be provided by the states under whose jurisdiction they fall. CHILE and MOROCCO both stressed the importance of collaboration and collectively identifying priority areas in the ocean that need protection and meet the EBSA criteria.

In regard to EBSAs that straddle areas within and beyond national jurisdiction, INDONESIA urged collaboration with relevant international organizations. FRANCE said the areas within the high seas fall under the jurisdiction of all states and international organizations and they should collaborate with the state whose territory the EBSA straddles. BRAZIL said that the areas within national jurisdiction and those beyond cannot be covered by the same process. Supported by ARGENTINA, he urged respect for the sovereign rights of parties in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and consistency with the work of the Intergovernmental Conference on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). Addressing the relationship between the CBD and UNCLOS, providing the international legal framework for maritime areas, CHINA said the CBD does not apply to areas beyond national jurisdiction and urged the rejection of disputed EBSA applications. The UK said that national jurisdiction should be respected for EBSAs in those areas and asked for clarification of the distinction between the repository and the information sharing mechanism.

PORTUGAL, supported by MOROCCO, MALAYSIA, and SWEDEN, supported extending the mandate of the informal advisory group on EBSAs. CAMEROON said the procedures for description of EBSAs should be based on evidence and an interactive and inclusive process. SOUTH AFRICA welcomed continued work on the modalities for descriptions of existing and new EBSAs, stating that modifications should also include the possibility of removing EBSAs from the repository in case they no longer meet the EBSA criteria. BRAZIL asked to clarify the process for seeking advice from the advisory body, and recommended that it have a flexible structure and involve experts from regions on the issues that come before it.

Due to limited time, Chair Benitez invited observers to submit written statements. He established a contact group on marine biodiversity, co-chaired by Marie-May Muzunguile (Seychelles) and Matthias Steitz (Germany), to convene on 10-11 May and present a CRP to plenary.

EBSAs CRP: On Wednesday, 9 June, Co-Chair Steitz reported on the contact group on marine biodiversity, which had been mandated to work on EBSA-related annexes on which the most divergent views had been expressed. He said that the contact group had decided to combine two sets of annexes and while they had productive discussions, they could not reach agreement on all issues.

The CRP on EBSAs (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.4) contains the draft recommendation and 12 annexes on:

- general considerations in the modification of EBSAs and the description of new areas;
- the repository and information sharing mechanism for EBSAs;
- reasons for modification and description of EBSAs;
- proponents of the modification of EBSAs;
- modification of descriptions of EBSAs for editorial reasons;
- the merged annex on modifications of descriptions of EBSAs within national jurisdiction, including EBSAs straddling multiple national jurisdictions;
- modification of descriptions of EBSAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction;
- modification of description of EBSAs straddling areas within and beyond national jurisdiction;
- proponents for the description of EBSAs;
- the merged annex on description of EBSAs in areas within national jurisdiction, including EBSAs straddling multiple national jurisdictions;
- description of EBSAs in areas beyond national jurisdiction; and
- description of EBSAs straddling areas both within and beyond national jurisdiction.

A number of the annexes contain bracketed provisions.

Chair Benitez said since there was not sufficient time at the virtual sessions, the CRP will be considered once SBSTTA-24 resumes in person. PORTUGAL expressed deep concern about the way marine issues were dealt with at SBSTTA-24, finding discussions were not conclusive, since there was no time to discuss several matters regarding marine biodiversity. She asked for clarity about intersessional work. Chair Benitez said discussions would continue at the resumed in-person meeting. COLOMBIA agreed with the concerns expressed, both in regard to the work on marine biodiversity and the underrepresentation of marine issues in the zero draft of the GBF. SENEGAL stressed the importance of marine and coastal biodiversity and asked about the way forward to ensure it is reflected in the GBF. Chair Benitez said the GBF WG Co-Chairs were listening to the SBSTTA discussions carefully and the advice from this meeting would be brought to their attention.

Work Programme of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

On Tuesday, 4 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/8), which contains the proposed programme of work of IPBES. Discussions continued on Sunday, 23 May.

Noting that the IPBES platform helps CBD parties accelerate the monitoring of global biodiversity goals, Serbia, on behalf of CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE (CEE), requested greater engagement with stakeholder groups, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, as well as other groups that support decision makers across levels. ETHIOPIA welcomed involvement of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in CBD implementation on the ground and the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge

into the work under IPBES. MEXICO welcomed the flexible programme of work that will allow IPBES to address emerging issues, as it did following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. On monitoring and reporting, JAPAN asked for clarification on the role of IPBES prior to COP15, given that some parties and organizations have already carried out some of this work. ARGENTINA highlighted the importance of having public policy experts participate in the future development of global assessments. The AFRICAN GROUP stressed the importance of considering ecological connectivity and encouraging regional assessments and direct conservation actions, and while welcoming cooperation with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), she said IPBES work should not be overrun by concepts and terminology used in negotiations related to climate change.

PORTUGAL, BELGIUM, INDONESIA, ETHIOPIA, the UK, and others supported strengthening collaboration between IPBES and the IPCC to better understand linkages between biodiversity loss and climate change. SPAIN urged development of an integrated approach to ensure greater synergies. COLOMBIA welcomed more scientific input and nature-based solutions as a key element of the next assessment. COLOMBIA, ETHIOPIA, FINLAND, and GERMANY urged taking into account IPBES' work on biodiversity and pandemics. CHINA noted that the workshops on biodiversity and pandemics, and on biodiversity and climate change, were not deliverables of IPBES, and asked for this to be reflected in the CBD decision. CAMBODIA welcomed IPBES's work on pollinators and the upcoming transformative change assessment. FINLAND, supported by NORWAY, asked to ensure IPBES involvement in monitoring the GBF, with CAMBODIA adding it should help set priority actions.

Several parties welcomed a second global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services, with GERMANY asking to clarify relationship with other stocktaking instruments. BELGIUM, NORWAY, and the EU called for a systematic approach to including IPBES deliverables in the CBD process. BRAZIL stressed the importance of preserving and respecting the scope and mandate of IPBES and cautioned against encroachment in the overlap between CBD and IPBES subject matters. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA expressed satisfaction with the complementary work of IPBES and the CBD. GERMANY said the work of IPBES was important for implementation of the CBD and GBF and urged including regular check-ins about this in the draft recommendation. The UK welcomed the contribution of IPBES assessments to CBD implementation and requested SBSTTA to review them as they become available. SPAIN suggested more explicit recognition of all of IPBES functions and tasks. FRANCE proposed to request the CBD Secretariat to systematically assess all the functions of IPBES for the functions of the convention as a regular agenda item with a timeline.

Regarding work on the national level, MOROCCO asked for wider distribution and utilization of existing IPBES work, especially on the national level. The AFRICAN GROUP emphasized the importance of translating and simplifying IPBES assessment outcomes into user-friendly formats. COLOMBIA, supported by PERU, stressed the importance of national scientific platforms. INDONESIA stressed the importance of national biodiversity databases, highlighting that successful national implementation will depend on cooperation between stakeholders at the national

and sub-national level, as well as global partnerships to support implementation. CANADA proposed edits to clarify that IPBES has a guiding role at the national level. ITALY acknowledged that IPBES outcomes give more scientific basis for achievement of the CBD objectives and urged taking into account knowledge from Indigenous Peoples and local communities to embody the concept of global partnership and more multi-dimensional relationships. He said that the warning on emergence of future pandemics in the report from the expert workshop should be addressed in the GBF and future work on biodiversity and health.

Stressing that effective monitoring is essential to ensure sustainability, IPBES reported on ongoing work under its first work programme, including on sustainable use of wild species and the initiation of work on new topics under the new work programme to 2030, including scoping for the nexus and transformative change assessments. She said the reports from the workshops on biodiversity and climate change and on biodiversity and pandemics, which had been welcomed by a number of parties, will form contributions to the thematic assessment of the interlinkages among biodiversity, water, food, and health (nexus assessment).

The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB), supported by SWEDEN and COLOMBIA, welcomed the integration of Indigenous knowledge in IPBES assessments, such as the one on biodiversity and ecosystem services, and urged parties to reference the work on cultural indicators for sustainable use and benefit sharing. The CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS noted that rights holders have different knowledge about biodiversity and are disproportionately affected by biodiversity loss. She urged IPBES to explore gender mainstreaming more and recommended the establishment of a gender task force for the inclusion of gender perspective in existing platforms. The GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN) said IPBES assessments show change over generations and ecological connectivity, urging the CBD to also adopt a broader and more holistic approach to match the transformative change needed to stem biodiversity loss, while taking into account Indigenous knowledge and community-based monitoring.

Noting common understandings, Chair Benitez said a CRP on the issue will be prepared for consideration during the third series of plenary sessions in June.

IPBES CRP: On Monday, 7 June, Chair Benitez tabled a CRP on IPBES (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.6) that had been prepared by the Secretariat based on previous interventions and contains the draft recommendation.

In the paragraph on the ground-breaking work of IPBES including Indigenous and local knowledge across its assessments, CANADA asked to remove the word "other" before stakeholders, to make it clear that Indigenous Peoples are not stakeholders and to ask IPBES to "continue to" strengthen this work. The UK asked to change "encourages" to "invites" IPBES to strengthen the efforts in the implementation of the relevant GBF objectives. Delegates agreed to these changes.

Regarding the paragraph on the rolling working programme up to 2030, BRAZIL asked, and delegates agreed, to set out that all objectives are mutually supportive and to delete reference to specific objectives. Regarding the paragraph on scoping reports, GERMANY and CANADA asked to "welcome" them, whereas BRAZIL and ARGENTINA wanted to "take note" since the reports were still

under preparation. Delegates agreed to keep both in brackets until the reports are tabled at IPBES. BRAZIL and ARGENTINA, opposed by COLOMBIA and COSTA RICA, asked to delete specific references to nature-based solutions and One Health, with the terms being bracketed.

On the paragraph concerning the expert workshop and report on biodiversity and pandemics, BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA, and opposed by GERMANY and BELGIUM, asked for the deletion of references to its relevance for the work of the Convention, including on interlinkages between biodiversity and health, and the GBF. GERMANY, supported by BELGIUM suggested that COP "welcome" rather than "take note" of the report. CANADA agreed the report was very important, but given that it did not go through a formal review processes, suggested that the COP "take note, with appreciation." GERMANY agreed, provided that the references to its relevance for the CBD work be retained. In the interest of time, Chair Benitez proposed bracketing the various options, including the final part of the paragraph.

Regarding the paragraph on cooperation between IPBES and the IPCC on a workshop and report, BRAZIL expressed frustration that the joint expert workshop had not been open to government experts. Expressing concern that this could set a dangerous precedent and undermine transparent and inclusive processes, he requested deleting the paragraph. SWITZERLAND, supported by CANADA, opposed deletion, stating that there was nothing to suggest that this would set a procedural precedent, and that it was rather about recognizing the interlinkages between biodiversity and climate change. The EU proposed that COP "take note, with appreciation" of the report of the co-sponsored workshop on biodiversity and climate change. COLOMBIA, supported by CHILE and others, proposed a compromise making the paragraph more general and open, while deleting the section taking note of the report. BRAZIL rejected this proposal. ARGENTINA, supporting the proposal by COLOMBIA, proposed to include a reference to "transparent and participatory" processes in future collaborations between the bodies, and to delete reference to an "integrated approach" with regard to assessments on biodiversity and climate change.

The EU, DENMARK, and the UK expressed frustration that the changes to the paragraph had weakened it significantly. The EU and UK insisted on including a reference to the co-sponsored workshop and report, with DENMARK asking for the reference to an "integrated approach" be maintained. SWEDEN proposed to bracket this until after the IPBES Plenary, scheduled to take place in June 2021. Noting that more parties wanted to take the floor, and in the interest of time, Chair Benitez proposed bracketing the entire paragraph, and said he would draft an alternative paragraph, including the proposals by Argentina.

Regarding the paragraph inviting IPBES to prepare a second global assessment, CANADA asked to specify that it be done before 2030, and delegates agreed, and to also invite IPBES to consider an assessment on ecological connectivity. On the paragraph requesting the CBD Secretariat to compile views of parties on the elements to be covered in the second global assessment, ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL and opposed by the EU, asked to delete a reference that it complements and contributes to the monitoring and review of the GBF. ARGENTINA said that if the EU wanted to keep the specific reference to the monitoring framework, then other examples should be added, such as the "different challenges faced by

developing countries in biodiversity conservation; and extension of the timeframe to the first industrial revolution and colonial periods.” The two options were kept in brackets.

Delegates agreed to proposals by CANADA to also compile the views of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and relevant stakeholders, and by the UK to add that the CBD Secretariat submit a report for consideration by SBSTTA prior to COP16. SWITZERLAND asked to add a provision “requesting the CBD Secretariat and inviting the IPBES Secretariat to explore options to further strengthen cooperation to identify deliverables for the work under the CBD and of elements to be included in a second assessment and to report to SBSTTA.” ARGENTINA asked to add that this be done in consultation with parties. BELGIUM proposed a separate paragraph requesting the CBD Secretariat to regularly and systematically assess and report to SBSTTA on how to consider deliverables from all functions and processes of IPBES for the implementation of the CBD. COLOMBIA asked to keep all the additional wording bracketed, to allow for closer review.

The EU asked to add, and delegates agreed, an additional paragraph requesting the CBD Secretariat to identify views from parties on how IPBES could, within its defined functions on producing further assessments, build capacity, strengthen knowledge and capacity, and contribute to the monitoring and review process of the GBF. On a paragraph inviting IPBES to consider nominating a representative to participate in the AHTEG on indicators for the GBF, CANADA proposed to make it more general, and just refer to IPBES contributing to the work of the AHTEG. ARGENTINA, opposed by COLOMBIA, asked to delete the entire provision and address it in the GBF text instead. The provision was bracketed.

Regarding the final provision, which ends with a call for technical and financial support, the UK asked, and delegates agreed, to use standard language to urge parties, and invite other governments, in a position to do so, to provide financial support. INDONESIA also asked to add a reference to assistance and capacity building.

Synthetic Biology

On Sunday, 23 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/4/Rev.1), which contained an overview of the process of submissions, online forum, and meeting of the AHTEG on synthetic biology, and a draft recommendation. Annex I contained the outcomes of the meeting of the AHTEG, and Annex 2 concerned the horizon scanning process.

MALAYSIA, MEXICO, MOROCCO, COLOMBIA, SWITZERLAND, and the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed the importance of following the precautionary principle, with FRANCE highlighting this especially in relation to engineered gene drives. MEXICO said developments in synthetic biology should be dealt with under international and national regulations, strict policies and procedures. He also reiterated that development and implementation should be in accordance with human rights-based approaches, especially taking into consideration the rights of Indigenous Peoples. South Africa, on behalf of the AFRICAN GROUP, along with MOROCCO, MALAYSIA, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, and the EU, supported the establishment of a multidisciplinary technical expert group for horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment. ARGENTINA cautioned against the establishment of a technical expert group, noting the pressure of time and financial resources in establishing new structures and processes. The AFRICAN GROUP said that establishment of an expert group requires careful

consideration to avoid creating a body that may fail to reach its mandate. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA stressed the importance of using expertise from a broad range of cultures and disciplines, including scientists and policy makers. PERU asked for broad participation across sectors, NGOs and Indigenous Peoples and local communities. MEXICO, FINLAND, and the EU asked that the studies by the multidisciplinary technical expert group look at potential positive and negative impacts, taking into account human, animal, and plant health, as well as cultural and socio-economic issues, including those facing Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and youth. PERU also urged for consideration of risk assessments of LMOs and new developments in synthetic biology. MEXICO, AUSTRIA, and FINLAND asked for clarification on the linkages between synthetic biology and LMOs under the Cartagena Protocol, with AUSTRIA suggesting that the proposed multidisciplinary technical expert group consider if there is synthetic biology not covered under the Cartagena Protocol.

On the criteria for new and emerging issues, GERMANY saw no need to do further work, urging that the horizon scanning focus on a two-step process over two intersessional periods. ITALY agreed, but said they were ready for SBSTTA to consider the issue during the next intersessional period, with the EU proposing an interim report on the effectiveness of the horizon scanning for SBSTTA-26.

MOROCCO, supported by MALAYSIA, reiterated the interlinkages between work on synthetic biology and DSI, and thus the relevance of the Nagoya Protocol. MEXICO noted that the inputs for the development of synthetic biology can derive from the use of Indigenous knowledge, which requires the free prior and informed consent of knowledge-holders. CUBA urged proper management of synthetic biology as a cross-cutting issue under the Convention and its Protocols. MOROCCO stressed the importance of considering geographic distribution, availability, and accessibility of tools and expertise across regions.

MALAYSIA, supported by COLOMBIA, highlighted the importance of parties ensuring that developing countries build capacity to carry out appropriate risk assessment and management of synthetic biology, with INDONESIA and UGANDA stressing regional and cross-regional cooperation and CHILE emphasizing the need for better exchange of information on technological progress. CUBA called for a vigorous capacity building process, the avoidance of accidental release, and obtaining prior informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities when necessary.

The IIFB said that the solutions for the biodiversity crisis lie in Indigenous knowledge and practices and not synthetic biology, stressing the importance of the free prior informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. She urged full and effective participation of Indigenous representatives from each of the seven UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) regions in the multidisciplinary technical expert group. The CBD ALLIANCE supported the multidisciplinary technical expert group and regular horizon scanning informed by new trends in synthetic biology, including in early stages of development. She said engineered gene drives pose unprecedented risks and called for an immediate global moratorium on their release into the environment and elaboration of rules for liability and redress.

SBSTTA Chair Benitez said that after hearing the interventions, some unresolved issues remained. He established a contact group

to be co-chaired by Ntakadzeni Tshidada (South Africa) and Werner Schenkel (Germany) with the mandate to work on the annex of the draft recommendation focusing on the details of horizon scanning. He later also established a Friends of the Chair group facilitated by Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) to address the issue of whether synthetic biology constituted a new and emerging issue.

Synthetic Biology CRP: On Tuesday, 8 June, Chair Benitez reopened discussions on synthetic biology. Helena Brown reported on the meeting of the Friends of the Chair group. She said the proposals of the group on whether synthetic biology constituted a new and emerging issue were included in the CRP on synthetic biology (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.8). Ntakadzeni Tshidada reported that the contact group on synthetic biology met twice and while they managed to make progress, especially on the horizon-scanning process, they were not able to reach consensus on all issues. As a result, a number of bracketed provisions remain in the CRP and others had not been discussed. Chair Benitez then asked delegates to focus on finding solutions for bracketed provisions in the CRP.

The CRP on synthetic biology contains a draft recommendation with sections on considerations for new and emerging issues and associated criteria, which were partially discussed in the Friends of the Chair group; and a section on the process for broad and regular horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment, in part discussed by the contact group. It also contains an annex on a broad and regular horizon-scanning, monitoring and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology. Discussions focused on the timing and frequency of horizon scanning and the establishment of a multidisciplinary technical expert group. Despite the initial discussions in the contact and Friends of the Chair groups, and the following text-based discussions in plenary, many provisions remain bracketed.

On the preambular paragraph recognizing, *inter alia*, the challenges experienced by the AHTEG in performing their analysis, SWITZERLAND noted duplication in the text, and proposed to delete the text in the operative paragraphs. BRAZIL disagreed, suggesting deleting the text in the preambular paragraph. This was agreed.

On the preambular paragraph noting the relevance of DSI, BRAZIL asked to delete this reference, noting that synthetic biology and DSI are being discussed separately. CANADA, stating that they would not push back against this proposal, wondered why this had not been brought up in earlier discussions. SWITZERLAND, supported by MEXICO, wished to see the reference to DSI maintained, proposing additional text to indicate the need to avoid duplication of work. These additions were kept in brackets.

Regarding the operative paragraph on whether synthetic biology is a new and emerging issue, Chair Benitez noted that the Friends of the Chair group had almost resolved the issue, and urged delegates to only provide suggestions on ways forward. FINLAND said that they were ready to accept the entire text. BRAZIL agreed and asked for the final part to clearly state: “recognizing that synthetic biology has not been determined to be a new and emerging issue.” Noting that the current operational definition of synthetic biology is very broad, SOUTH AFRICA asked to retain all brackets until the issue is resolved throughout the document.

On the paragraph on whether the broad and regular horizon scanning should be conducted over the period of one or two intersessional periods, TOGO said that they would prefer to see

reference to one intersessional period rather than two, to assess its feasibility. GERMANY preferred two intersessional periods, saying that this would allow optimization of the process. SOUTH AFRICA agreed, but in the spirit of compromise suggested a reference to an initial first cycle, and for the COP to then agree on next steps. BRAZIL opposed this, stating that they understood “initial” to suggest a second cycle. The EU recalled a previous COP decision recognizing the need for a “broad and regular” horizon scanning, and proposed keeping the original reference to an initial period of two cycles. Suggesting that after COP15 the CBD should focus on the implementation of the GBF, BRAZIL warned against creating further work and preferred only one cycle. They agreed to maintain the original text with all brackets remaining.

Before text-based discussions began on Wednesday, 9 June, BELGIUM and ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL and COLOMBIA, expressed concern about the process of pushing through the adoption of CRPs that contain contentious and unresolved issues, and said that this would narrow down options rather than leave them open for collaborative problem-solving later on. ARGENTINA also reminded participants of their issues with connectivity, and questioned the appropriateness of pushing ahead when so many parties face similar issues. Noting these comments, Chair Benitez urged delegates to make the most of discussions now, and expressed hope that compromises could be found during this session or at the in-person meeting of SBSTTA-24, and recommenced discussions on the CRP on synthetic biology.

Regarding the paragraph on whether to establish a multidisciplinary technical expert group on synthetic biology, SWITZERLAND, supported by TOGO, and opposed by ARGENTINA and COLOMBIA, insisted that only a multidisciplinary body would be adequate to address the issue. Parties approved the paragraph with all brackets remaining.

On the paragraph discussing the interlinkages between the proposed multidisciplinary technical expert group and horizon scanning, BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA, requested to keep the brackets, because the respective issues had not been resolved. The paragraph was adopted with brackets.

Regarding a provision on broad international cooperation, CANADA, supported by KENYA and AUSTRALIA, expressed concern about the general reference to the Biosafety Clearing House, and delegates agreed to specify that its use should be limited to forms of synthetic biology that are considered LMOs.

In a paragraph listing requests to the Executive Secretary, delegates agreed to bracket references to the timing of horizon scanning and the multidisciplinary technical expert group throughout. They debated a specific reference to employing a human rights approach in the context of participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, with the UK and INDONESIA asking to delete it, while MEXICO and SWEDEN asked to maintain it. It remained bracketed.

In a paragraph on consideration of the outcomes of the horizon scanning process, delegates agreed to bracket all references to timing, including meetings of SBSTTA, the COP, and the Nagoya and the Cartagena Protocols. Regarding a paragraph on SBSTTA considering the effectiveness of horizon scanning, delegates agreed to bracket all references to timing and, upon a request by ARGENTINA, to bracket a reference to make a recommendation to extend that process.

Delegates then discussed the annex on a broad and regular horizon-scanning, monitoring, and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology. On the paragraph associated with the table on the horizon scanning, monitoring, and assessment of the most recent technological developments in synthetic biology, ARGENTINA noted that there remained unresolved issues in the table itself, and thus proposed, with delegates agreeing, to leave the brackets to indicate that discussions are ongoing.

In the paragraph regarding SBSTTA's review of the outcomes, which contained a bracketed reference to "including social, economic, and cultural impacts as well as related ethical issues," SOUTH AFRICA, supported by TOGO and MALAWI, proposed deleting the bracketed text, stating that the issues were covered under paragraph 26 of the Cartagena Protocol on socio-economic considerations. MEXICO opposed, saying that not all the risks and issues associated with synthetic biology are covered under the Cartagena Protocol, and noted that there is broad support among parties and observers for the inclusion of this terminology. The paragraph was adopted with brackets. Regarding the section on the terms of reference of the multidisciplinary technical expert group, ARGENTINA suggested keeping the entire section in brackets as this is a complicated discussion best left to in-person meetings. The section was adopted in brackets.

Risk Assessment and Risk Management of LMOs

On Monday, 24 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/5), containing an overview of the process carried out and a draft recommendation along with the annexed outcome of the meeting of the AHTEG on risk assessment, including parts on living modified fish and LMOs containing engineered gene drives. Discussions focused on whether guidance should be developed for each of these and, with regard to the latter, on the appropriate process.

MOROCCO noted that existing guidance on risk assessment offers a good basis for assessing LMOs that have been developed through classic engineering methods, however stressed there are still gaps in knowledge on modern biotechnology, including gene drives. He warned that the release of these could affect entire ecosystems, with introduced populations being hard to control and effects possibly going beyond territories or targeted species. BRAZIL highlighted that some studies are showing potential benefits of LMOs, including efforts in supporting the conservation of biodiversity, and cautioned against unnecessary barriers to biotechnology research. SOUTH AFRICA asked for broad international cooperation to support parties in the development of capacities in establishing national biosafety frameworks. MOROCCO and the EU also stressed the importance of capacity building and the continued sharing of knowledge and meeting the needs of all parties.

BRAZIL stated the draft recommendation should not develop additional guidance on living modified fish, with the EU suggesting that available resources should be used to develop additional guidance materials on risk assessment of LMOs containing engineered gene drives. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said it was necessary to develop guidance on living modified fish, and organisms containing engineered gene drives, that hold potential risk of affecting biodiversity on a wider scale across national borders.

MEXICO urged that guidance on living modified fish should still be developed in the future since releases have already taken place and have a high dispersal possibility, with MALAYSIA adding that not all countries have the capacity to do their own assessments. INDONESIA agreed, recalling previous calls for FAO to support discussions on the topic and the development of action plans and adequate policy responses. SWITZERLAND agreed with the development of future guidance on living modified fish, pointing to liabilities and risks. BELARUS pointed to the lack of information on long-term effects of living modified fish and the great uncertainty about their spread in ecosystems, in light of work on living modified crustaceans and algae. She urged broadening the mandate for future work on aquatic marine living modified organisms. SOUTH AFRICA, while believing that additional guidance on living modified fish was not necessary at the moment, asked for the work on the topic to continue, highlighting that it is linked to economic activities of some developing countries.

SOUTH AFRICA stressed the need for parties to take a precautionary approach when addressing threats posed by LMOs containing gene drives, in accordance with national and international obligations, with assessments done on a case-by-case basis, which weighs risks against benefits and includes the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. MEXICO agreed to focus on the elaboration of guidance on LMOs with engineered gene drives, and said that socio-economic issues should be taken into account. FRANCE recommended that additional guidance materials on engineered gene drives should address general issues and possible applications in the future; and while expressing flexibility, with regard to the process for developing such guidance, he recommended involvement of representatives with specific expertise from international organizations, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and IPBES.

GERMANY said that any guidance materials on risk assessment needs to be of high scientific quality and said that guidance on risk assessment for LMOs containing engineered gene drives could be developed by a small group of experts and then discussed through the open online forum in an overall party driven process. PERU saw a role for the open online forum and the AHTEG on risk assessment in regard to developing guidance on gene drives. AUSTRIA urged a clear, transparent, and effective process, where drafting could start in a smaller expert group potentially within the AHTEG that could then review the work. SWITZERLAND said guidance on gene drives should first focus on applications in the near future and, as long as risk and benefits cannot be properly assessed, release into the environment should be avoided. BELARUS supported development of guidance on gene drives and also synthetic biology products for next generation LMOs. CUBA said it was important to create capacity on engineered gene drives, including on proper monitoring, due to the high uncertainty with the application.

The IIFB stressed that LMOs can be unpredictable and have negative long-term, permanent, and irreversible impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, highlighting the need for a precautionary approach and the full and effective participation of Indigenous peoples in risk assessment and management. She proposed that when developing additional guidance on gene drives, the AHTEG include representation from the seven UNPFII regions, and to incorporate the requirement of free prior and informed consent of potentially affected groups. The CBD WOMENS

CAUCUS stressed the importance of building the capacity of people without expertise to participate in risk assessments, and, together with the CBD ALLIANCE, supported the development of further guidance on risk assessment of living modified fish, especially given that they can easily spread across national borders.

The CBD ALLIANCE called for a global moratorium on the release, including experimental release, of LMOs containing gene drives into the environment. She noted that the risk assessment guidance under the AHTEG should build on and complement existing CBD decisions, and must respect the free prior and informed consent of potentially affected Indigenous Peoples and local communities, and respect their right to say no to the release of LMOs containing engineered gene drives within their lands, territories, and waters. Regarding the linkages between LMOs and health, IMPERIAL COLLEGE LONDON and the FOUNDATION FOR NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH called attention to the latest edition of the WHO guidance framework for testing genetically modified mosquitos for vector control, which explores procedures for risk assessment and management, including stakeholder engagement.

Chair Benitez said that after hearing the interventions, some unresolved issues remained and he established a contact group to be co-chaired by Ntakadzeni Tshidada (South Africa) and Werner Schenkel (Germany) with the mandate to work on both the substance and process to develop specific guidance materials on LMOs containing engineered gene drives and on a proposal for the annexed terms of reference for the AHTEG.

Risk Assessment CRP: On Wednesday, 9 June, Chair Benitez first invited a report back from the contact group. Contact Group Co-Chair Schenkel noted that participants had engaged in intense but productive discussions. He said that parties had made progress, especially on the voluntary guidance materials and the implementation of the decision. He said that the terms of reference for the AHTEG had been further developed, yet noted that disagreements remained on the scope of its additional guidance materials on risk assessment for LMOs containing engineered gene drives.

The CRP (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.9) contains a draft recommendation with annexed terms of reference for the AHTEG on risk assessment. A core element is the development of additional guidance on risk assessment for LMOs containing engineered gene drives, through the AHTEG on risk assessment.

Chair Benitez asked delegates to refrain from making suggestions that would reopen issues already discussed in the contact group, and proposed that parties adopt the text as a whole, with remaining brackets.

FINLAND, supported by PORTUGAL, FRANCE, and others, while not opposing the proposal, asked to include an additional preambular paragraph to read “reconfirming the importance of the precautionary approach, in accordance with the Cartagena Protocol.” BRAZIL asked for it to read “recalling” as opposed to “reconfirming.” COLOMBIA asked for the entire text to be put in brackets, saying that there were provisions they had not had time to consider. Chair Benitez asked for their collaboration in only retaining existing brackets, and delegates agreed. TOGO asked for a further bracket to be placed around a reference to the AHTEG, since its format had not yet been agreed upon. Parties agreed to adopt the document with existing brackets.

Biodiversity and Agriculture

On Monday, 24 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/7/Rev.1), which includes the review of the international initiative for the conservation and sustainable use of soil biodiversity and the updated plan of action.

Ghana, for the AFRICAN GROUP, welcomed the updated plan of action 2020-2030 and recommended specifically relating it to the GBF and implementing the international initiative through national laws and development of policies for land and soil management. He urged capacity building to ensure transfer of knowledge, including to traditional authorities and landowners, and awareness raising activities. Regarding data collection and the use of traditional knowledge, BRAZIL reminded parties of CBD obligations linked to fair and equitable benefit sharing with the country and community of origin, as well as requirements for prior informed consent of Indigenous Peoples and local communities. INDONESIA, ECUADOR, and SWITZERLAND supported future collaboration with UN bodies, such as the FAO and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). BRAZIL noted appreciation for the cooperation with FAO in developing the updated plan of action.

SWITZERLAND proposed inclusion of reference to soil biodiversity within the targets and headline indicators of the GBF. FRANCE invited the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), FAO, UNCCD, and other initiatives to support the integration of the work on soil biodiversity into the GBF. MOROCCO said that by maintaining soil biodiversity farmers can make significant contribution to biodiversity conservation and mitigation of climate change; and urged filling gaps in the updated plan of action through awareness raising and research about the importance of soil biodiversity and its ecosystem services.

SAMOA, also on behalf of PALAU, supported increased data collection including on the link to marine biodiversity, which can be affected by land-based activities, and establishing clear links with the GBF. She called for financial assistance from the Global Environment Facility (GEF) for an ecosystem-based approach to soil biodiversity. COLOMBIA also asked for more work to support mainstreaming across sectors, and capacity building, especially linked to research and technology transfer, and urged the elimination of incentives harmful to biodiversity. Regarding the implementation of the plan of action on soil biodiversity, PERU highlighted the importance of joint work on synergies between relevant sectors to ensure the necessary changes in land and water policies.

ARGENTINA pointed to a large variety of strategies to preserve soil biodiversity and recommended a flexible approach, noting that research, monitoring, and assessment fall to national governments and require funding. CHINA said that food and nutritional security should be a primary goal and technical support should be provided to developing countries. KENYA stressed the central role of pollinators for health of ecosystems and production of food and livelihoods. Noting the worrying decline in pollinators despite ongoing efforts to reverse it, he called for more concerted efforts to enhance habitat connectivity. SOUTH AFRICA urged more funding to support work on pollinators.

Noting loss of soil biodiversity is one of the ten greatest threats to biodiversity, FAO stressed the urgent need to ramp up efforts to protect soil biodiversity, and its importance for food security; and the need to invest in sustainable use and management of soils at all levels. The CBD WOMEN’S CAUCUS proposed new text to

include references to restoration activities, as well as participation of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including their free prior and informed consent. The CBD ALLIANCE urged removal of perverse incentives and references to bio-solids and avoiding further soil biodiversity losses, especially due to large-scale industrial agriculture. She pointed to traditional forms of land management as an important tool to preserve soil biodiversity, and called the lack of references to soil biodiversity a major omission in the GBF.

The INTERNATIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE FOR FOOD SOVEREIGNTY stressed the important contribution of Indigenous Peoples and local communities and small-scale producers to agro-ecology and called for agro-ecological ecosystem-based solutions to be addressed in the GBF. The NATURE CONSERVANCY and WWF underscored the importance of protecting and restoring soil biodiversity to food security, and asked to integrate specific related targets in the GBF. The UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE CONSERVATION LEADERSHIP ALUMNI NETWORK said agriculture can form part of ecosystem conservation and urged sustainability at the farm and landscape level.

Noting general support for the draft recommendation, Chair Benitez said a CRP will be prepared for review during the third series of plenary sessions in June, and urged delegates to also raise issues related to soil biodiversity in the discussions about the GBF to ensure inclusion in the related documents.

Soil Biodiversity CRP: On Monday, 7 June, Chair Benitez opened discussions of the CRP on the review of the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity and its updated Plan of Action (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.5). It contains the draft recommendation and the annexed draft plan of action 2020-2030 for the International Initiative for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity.

On the preambular paragraphs, ARGENTINA asked for “food systems” to be replaced with “agricultural systems,” stating that the former term is not well-defined under the CBD. BELGIUM said that “food systems” was understood as broader than “agricultural systems,” and proposed referencing “food and agricultural systems.” SWITZERLAND recalled the recent UN Summit on Food Systems, suggesting that this is an established term. BRAZIL disagreed, asking parties to stick to established definitions under the CBD. Chair Benitez suggested, and delegates agreed, to put “and food” in brackets.

COLOMBIA asked for the inclusion of a reference to recognize activities to provide the conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil biodiversity are key for “climate change mitigation and adaptation.” BRAZIL asked to only mention “climate change adaptation.”

Regarding the paragraph on the updated Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Soil Biodiversity, BRAZIL pointed out that the details of the Plan were still being discussed and suggested putting brackets around the paragraph. GERMANY asked for the text to reference the Plan as “an instrument” for the implementation of the GBF, rather than a “voluntary means.” BRAZIL suggested adding “in accordance with national circumstances and priorities.” ARGENTINA asked for the retention of a reference to the voluntary nature of the Plan. In the end, Chair Benitez proposed a compromise, which referenced the Plan as being considered “an instrument, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with

national circumstances and priorities” to support the implementation of the GBF. In the end, the paragraph was accepted with the changes in brackets.

On the paragraph on the report on the State of Knowledge on Soil Biodiversity, SWITZERLAND insisted on “welcomes the report” rather than “takes note.” Recalling that a number of states had opposed such changes in earlier sessions, Chair Benitez proposed, and delegates agreed, to put brackets around the two options for the opening phrase. On the next paragraph on the implementation of the updated Action Plan, BELGIUM asked to reference capacity building “and development” to align with ongoing SBI discussions on terminology.

Regarding direct and indirect drivers of soil biodiversity loss, JAPAN asked that parties “identify,” in addition to phase out, and eliminate, incentives, taxes, and subsidies harmful to soil biodiversity. INDONESIA, supported by ARGENTINA and opposed by COLOMBIA, suggested deleting reference to direct and indirect drivers of soil biodiversity loss and land degradation, as well as “including land-use change, and to phase out and eliminate incentives, taxes, and subsidies harmful to biodiversity,” stating that this is complicated due to each party’s unique characteristics and circumstances. Chair Benitez put brackets around the entire paragraph. AUSTRIA, supported by BELGIUM, asked for clarification on procedure, saying that it was not necessary to put brackets around the entire paragraph, rather than only the proposed amendments.

On the paragraph on the integration of conservation, restoration, and sustainable use of soil biodiversity into agricultural systems, BRAZIL, supported by INDONESIA, proposed deleting references to “including incentives, and other measure such as taxes and subsidies to promote sustainable soil management,” stating that the CBD was not the appropriate forum. INDONESIA also proposed deleting reference to “at all levels” of agricultural systems, land and soil management, development programmes, and relevant policies. BELGIUM, supported by COLOMBIA, proposed adding “and other managed ecosystems” in addition to agricultural systems. BRAZIL, supported by INDONESIA and ARGENTINA, asked for this addition to be put in brackets, saying that it was a new term for them. COLOMBIA asked for the inclusion of “and other sectors identified by previous COP decisions.” The final text contains brackets around all the proposed changes.

On the paragraph on awareness raising, INDONESIA asked to add a reference to local communities, farmers, women, and youth, while COSTA RICA asked not to include a reference to farmers, suggesting they are already included in local communities. COLOMBIA, opposed by BELGIUM and the UK, asked to include a reference to North-South technology transfer and capacity building.

Regarding the paragraph on facilitating the implementation of the updated plan of action at the national level, the UK proposed referring to “involvement of parties as appropriate” instead of the reference to “ministries of the environment and agriculture,” which PERU asked to maintain saying it was important for national implementation. CHILE asked to add agencies that are competent at the national level. Chair Benitez proposed, and delegates agreed, to refer to “involvement of parties, in particular ministries of agriculture and environment at the national level, as appropriate.”

In the paragraph on funding, CANADA, supported by SWITZERLAND, asked to delete the reference to developed countries and to CBD Article 20. ARGENTINA asked to keep it. The UK proposed to open the paragraph with “urging parties and inviting other countries and organizations in a position to do so” to provide the respective support. The different options were kept in brackets.

On Tuesday, 8 June, delegates concluded discussions of the CRP. Regarding the provision inviting the Global Environment Facility (GEF), other donors, and funding agencies to provide funding, CANADA, asked to remove the specific reference to the GEF and just refer to funding agencies. Noting that the GEF was the financial mechanism of the Convention, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, and COLOMBIA opposed, and the reference was retained. Delegates agreed to requests by BELGIUM to include reference to capacity-building initiatives and CHILE to include countries with economies in transition. Noting that it seemed out of place, the UK asked, and delegates agreed, to delete the reference to “equip traditional authorities with the knowledge to prioritize land and soil conservation issues.”

On the annexed updated Plan of Action 2020-2030, SBSTTA Chair Benitez urged delegates to approve it, pointing to the development process, peer review, and integration of comments made by parties in previous readings. BRAZIL said they have comments and concerns about some of the actions and wanted to discuss them in plenary for the sake of transparency. MEXICO pointed out that the plan contemplates a lot of different actors and would benefit from the Secretariat homogenizing it further. COLOMBIA also wanted to submit comments on the annex. The document was approved with the entire draft Plan of Action in brackets.

Invasive Alien Species

On Wednesday, 26 May, the Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/10). MOROCCO noted the large volume of additional guidance, asking for this to be simplified to support mainstreaming at the domestic level.

Expressing concern at the short time left to discuss this topic, SWEDEN stressed that despite the CBD’s pioneering work, invasive alien species continue to spread and threaten biodiversity on a global scale. She argued that the release of the guidance without revisions would be counterproductive and lead to confusion, recommending that the Secretariat convene an additional meeting on this and present results to SBSTTA before COP16. INDONESIA called for increased global effort to address invasive alien species, and to enhance cooperation for monitoring, review, and data exchange, especially to enable early detection and rapid response systems.

ARGENTINA and PERU supported the continuation of work to explore the possibilities to harmonize labelling of hazardous living organisms. MOROCCO further asked to train relevant staff at borders. ARGENTINA and AUSTRALIA suggested the inclusion of references to international agreements, including measures adopted at the World Trade Organization (WTO). ISRAEL highlighted severe issues with invasive alien species in the Mediterranean region, and recommended more work on avoiding reintroduction within corridors. INDONESIA and SAMOA asked for improved capacity development and training across sectors on a global scale, with PERU asking for support from funding institutions and development agencies.

BRAZIL expressed concern that the proposed approach goes beyond the scope mandated by COP14, which requires that all measures be in line with international agreements. He noted that labelling falls under the purview of the WTO and their experts should have been invited to join the work. He did not agree with the annexes, calling them too broad, and with requests to the Executive Secretary to continue the work.

FINLAND noted that the annexes still have to be negotiated and requested referring to the work of the AHTEG. COLOMBIA welcomed the special consideration given to effects on human health and urged deeper analysis of issues in the annexes and provision of financial resources. MALAYSIA called for more technical guidance including on risk assessments, control, and eradication efforts, as well as early warning systems. SPAIN proposed guidance related to tourism, air transport, and water transfers and navigation. CHILE asked for more mechanisms in the aquatic and marine context and for border detection, as well as collaboration on preventing bio-invasions. JAPAN said management of invasive alien species should be part of the GBF, with UGANDA urging inclusion of a specific target. SOUTH AFRICA asked to recognize that anthropogenic changes to the environment make the issue worse.

SAMOA highlighted that global trade increases the spread of invasive alien species, especially for island states. He noted that the COVID-19 pandemic increased demand for e-commerce, which also heightens the risk of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, stressing the importance of addressing this through the development of tools and mechanisms to identify commodities of concern. With regard to the tools and strategies to address risks associated with e-commerce, ECUADOR noted the importance of funding, generating, and reinforcing capacities across local authorities to better operationalize national and international frameworks. FRANCE proposed requesting states to prioritize the use of non-intrusive technologies for the detection of invasive alien species. AUSTRALIA welcomed the supplementary advice on transboundary e-commerce, and asked to highlight the voluntary nature of this guidance. He also asked for reference to be made to the participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in the annex on methods, tools, and measurements for the identification and minimization of risks associated with climate change.

The CBD WOMEN’S CAUCUS urged inclusion of references to women and youth throughout, as well as the differentiation of impacts based on gender. The IIFB requested support for inclusion of wording to ensure meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, their traditional knowledge, bio-cultural indicators, and free prior and informed consent. The INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN) supported the establishment of an AHTEG and coordination of national strategies. FAO emphasized the need to work with plant-protection organizations and encouraged use of international standards. ISLAND CONSERVATION pointed to the need for new tools for the management of invasive alien species.

Chair Benitez said a CRP would be prepared and, if a contact group was required, participants would be notified. Later, a Friends of the Chair group, facilitated by Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), was established, and met before the third set of virtual plenary meetings.

Invasive Alien Species CRP: On Wednesday, 9 June, Barudanovic reported on the work of the Friends of the Chair group on the annexes. She said the text in the first two paragraphs of the CRP (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.7) represents the outcome of the discussions, although one set of square brackets remained, and that the proposed process foresees peer review of the annexes, an online forum to comment, and intersessional review by SBSTTA. The CRP contains the draft recommendation and annexes on:

- draft methods for cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis that best apply to the management of invasive alien species;
- draft methods, tools, and measures for identification and minimization of additional risks associated with cross-border e-commerce in live organisms and the impacts thereof;
- draft methods, tools, and strategies for the management of invasive alien species as it relates to prevention of potential risks arising from climate change and associated natural disasters and land use changes;
- draft risk analysis on the potential consequences of the introduction of invasive alien species on social, economic, and cultural values;
- draft use of existing databases on invasive alien species and their impacts, to support risk communication; and
- draft additional advice and technical guidance on invasive alien species management.

Chair Benitez said that since there was not sufficient time at the virtual session, the CRP will be considered once SBSTTA-24 resumes in person.

Biodiversity and Health

On Tuesday, 8 June, SBSTTA Bureau member Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) chaired the first discussion on the agenda item on biodiversity and health. The Secretariat introduced the relevant document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/9), which contained a report on activities undertaken to mainstream biodiversity and health linkages and a draft recommendation. The annex contained the draft global action plan for biodiversity and health.

Ukraine, on behalf of CEE, noted that biodiversity and human health are closely linked with biodiversity providing important life support systems, with its loss enhancing the risk of zoonotic disease. She stressed the importance of raising public awareness through educational programmes, and the need to establish easy to understand resources, proposing an amendment reflecting this.

PORTUGAL, along with UGANDA and others, stressed the importance of mainstreaming biodiversity across health sectors. Along with SPAIN, SWEDEN, NEW ZEALAND, and many others, she emphasized the importance of implementing the One Health approach, referenced in GBO 5, and called for this issue to be better reflected in the GBF. While recognizing the risk of future zoonotic disease and pandemics, SPAIN also asked parties to consider the importance of biodiverse green and blue spaces to peoples' physical and mental health. SWEDEN asked for the GBF WG Co-Chairs to consider the documents under this agenda item, and suggested the COP call on the Secretariat, WHO, and other relevant organizations, to continue their work on health indicators.

COLOMBIA, ARGENTINA, CANADA, and BRAZIL expressed concern that the working paper was made available too late for a proper review by participants, noting their comments were preliminary. COLOMBIA proposed the inclusion of a reference to the IPBES report on biodiversity and pandemics, stressing the

importance of decisions based on scientific evidence. COLOMBIA, along with ECUADOR, asked for strengthening capacity development and resource sharing through technical and financial support to enable the effective implementation of the action plan. NEW ZEALAND asked for the inclusion of a reference to the skills and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

CANADA made overarching comments on how environmental health issues relate to chronic diseases, pandemics, and recovery, and welcomed the more gender-responsive approach in the current document. Pointing to the current pandemic as an example of the interconnection of biodiversity and human health, INDONESIA asked to address unsustainable consumption of wildlife for food and the wildlife trade by exploring synergies between international conventions working on the issue. The NETHERLANDS said the annexed pandemic recovery stimulus measures should be positioned more prominently in the document. MEXICO urged mainstreaming biodiversity into human health through the One Health approach. Reiterating that the IPBES report on biodiversity and pandemics did not constitute an official deliverable, CHINA, supported by BRAZIL, asked to take into account the discussion on this report under the IPBES agenda item, and to delete the reference to a right to a healthy environment, since it was not broadly discussed under the CBD. SWITZERLAND urged interdisciplinary work and a holistic approach to avoid future pandemics. GERMANY pointed to IPBES finding that the cost of pandemic prevention is just a small fraction of the cost of pandemic response and urged better preparation in the future. JAPAN asked for clarification on the mandate of the CBD related to biodiversity and health and the contribution it can make to the One Health approach.

FINLAND highlighted scientific evidence that stresses the important role that access and connecting to nature can have in preventing disease and helping recovery. Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL, stressed the global inequality in vaccine roll out, noting that developing countries are still far from getting the pandemic under control, and suggested that these concerns be reflected in the text. He argued that the current draft recommendation is ignoring important social and economic dimensions of the One Health approach, and proposed putting the text in square brackets for future discussion. BRAZIL noted the significance of scientific and technological developments, including the link to genetic resources. Supported by UGANDA, BRAZIL also stressed that the CBD objective on benefit-sharing was not adequately reflected in the text. UGANDA, supported by SOUTH AFRICA, noted the importance of expeditious, fair, and equitable sharing of benefits, including ensuring access to affordable treatment for people in need, especially in developing countries.

FRANCE welcomed the multi-dimensional approach of the action plan, especially the importance of protecting nature for its own sake and not just its benefits to humans. He also emphasized the importance of recognizing that human and animal health are interdependent and linked to the ecosystems within which they exist. CHILE urged parties to recognize the loss of biodiversity negatively impacts the health sector, while the health sector also has the potential to impact biodiversity in ways that jeopardize the health of ecosystems, and ecosystem functions and services that are essential to humanity. She also highlighted the importance of the participation and inclusion of all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, and the elderly. BANGLADESH

stressed the importance of considering issues of biosafety and biosecurity in the “holistic consideration of the health of all peoples” under the principles of the action plan. He therefore asked for the plan to consider these issues to ensure safeguards for biodiversity in all anthropogenic research, development, and commercialization activities involving any living organisms.

COSTA RICA pointed to the high cost of pandemics in terms of human lives and financial losses and the long-term effects when viruses turn endemic, further contributing to the poverty cycle. SOUTH AFRICA said the global action plan required further discussion and should be bracketed. The PHILIPPINES said post-pandemic recovery efforts should be supportive of biodiversity initiatives and not result in cuts. PERU requested that National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) include a point on prevention of future pandemics. MALAYSIA asked to consider the socio-economic and financial impacts of pandemics.

Noting that human, plant, and ecosystem health is instrumental to building resilience to present and future health risks, the WHO urged building a better understanding of the social and environmental determinants of health, through development of integrated science-based indicators on biodiversity and human health. UNEP called for increased synergies between other multilateral environmental agreements, stressing the importance of all environmental dimensions and determinants of health, including climate change and pollution. FAO recommended that the integrated science-based indicators, metrics, and progress measurement tools on biodiversity and health should consider the environmental contribution to One Health as part of efforts to reduce the risk of future pandemics.

The IIFB stressed that the integration of biodiversity and health must have the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, especially in relation to their knowledge, innovations, and practices related to health, as well as in consideration of the relevant rules for accessing their genetic resources, and made textual recommendations in that regard. The CBD WOMEN’S CAUCUS stressed the importance of integrating a rights-based approach into the elements and activities of the action plan. She highlighted the various ways that women have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, including additional social, cultural, and economic burdens, as well as the increased cases of gender-based violence. Here, she stressed that we cannot “recover and build back better” unless we bend the curve on inequality and injustice. Likewise, the GYBN stressed that children, youth, and future generations are among the most vulnerable to the effects of environmental harm, with possible long-lasting repercussions and negative impact on children’s rights to life, health, and development, to an adequate standard of living, and to play and recreation. She also stressed that the biodiversity crisis must be understood as a pressing public health concern, and called for cross-sectoral collaboration and trust building across all levels and actors, including experts such as traditional knowledge holders.

On Wednesday, 9 June, Chair Benitez established a contact group on biodiversity and health, which will meet during the in-person meeting of SBSTTA-24. It will be co-chaired by Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) and Marina von Weissenberg (Finland). He asked for parties that had not yet done so to submit their written statements so that these could be considered in drafting a CRP.

Adoption of the First Part of the SBSTTA-24 Meeting Report

On Wednesday, 9 June, Rapporteur Barudanovic presented the report of the virtual part of SBSTTA-24 (CBD/SBSTTA/24/Part1/L.1), noting that it is largely procedural and highlights actions on organizational matters like establishment of contact groups. Chair Benitez then proceeded to ask parties to approve the report section by section. SWEDEN asked when and where intersessional work would be covered. The Secretariat explained that since the meeting would be suspended at the end of this session and later resumed, this did not constitute an intersessional period and some work would continue.

With regard to the section on the GBF, CANADA asked for clarification on the compilation of the survey results, whether the Co-Chairs of the contact group on the GBF, with the support of the Secretariat, were to revise the monitoring framework to “integrate,” rather than “align” it, with the first draft of the GBF. ARGENTINA opposed the reference to integration between the monitoring framework and the GBF, and the Secretariat clarified that work on the GBF text was up to the GBF WG. Delegates agreed to a proposal by the EU to “align it as necessary.”

Regarding the section on synthetic biology, BRAZIL asked for a paragraph to be removed that singled them out as disagreeing on a particular matter, noting that other parties had also disagreed. ARGENTINA also asked for a reference to be made to the fact that parties had faced problems with connectivity during discussions on the agenda item. The section was approved with these changes.

On the section on risk assessment, GERMANY, supported by BRAZIL wanted the paragraph on the mandate of the contact group to be more precise, and proposed adding “to develop additional guidance materials on risk assessments of LMOs containing engineered gene drives.” With these changes, the section was approved.

Regarding the section on marine and coastal biodiversity, COLOMBIA and SENEGAL both asked for their statements to be reflected in the text, with SENEGAL also calling for a reference to be added stating that marine and coastal biodiversity is extremely important to them. DENMARK proposed adding the concerns earlier expressed by PORTUGAL that marine issues had not been sufficiently addressed at the meeting. With these changes, the section was approved.

With regard to the section on biodiversity and agriculture, AUSTRIA asked for reference to be made to the fact that the annex with the updated action plan on soil biodiversity had not been addressed due to time limitations. ARGENTINA wanted it noted that they had experienced connectivity issues during discussions on this agenda item. With these changes, the section was approved.

The sections on IPBES and invasive species were approved without amendments, and the section on biodiversity and health was left open to be completed at the next meeting. With that, SBSTTA-24 approved the report of the first part of the meeting on the virtual sessions.

Chair Benitez noted that as SBSTTA-24 was only being suspended, there would be no closing statements from delegates or observers. CBD Executive Secretary Elizabeth Mrema thanked all participants for their commitments over the marathon six weeks of

negotiations. She noted that despite many challenges SBSTTA made significant contributions ahead of the GBF WG, and ultimately the COP.

SBSTTA Chair Benitez explained that the SBSTTA-24 meeting would be suspended to resume as an in-person meeting either back-to-back with an in-person meeting of the GBF WG or COP15. He provided a brief overview of the first ever virtual SBSTTA negotiations, which held nine plenaries, 14 sessions of contact and Friends of the Chair groups, and produced nine CRPs, six of which were approved, although many with brackets. He said that never before had that many participants registered for a SBSTTA meeting and many lessons were learned from the virtual sessions. He thanked everyone for their patience despite chronic time constraints and not being able to see each other. He suspended the first part of SBSTTA-24 at 10:16 EDT (GMT-4).

A Brief Analysis of the Meeting

The virtual meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA-24) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) marked a number of firsts. It was the first time that an official CBD negotiation took place virtually. It was also the first time a CBD meeting took place over six weeks, with plenaries interspersed with contact groups and Friends of the Chair sessions and meetings of other biodiversity-related Conventions. Throughout SBSTTA-24, it became increasingly clear to participants, Chairs, and organizers that these elements posed new challenges for discussions and outcomes, with many sensing the energy that usually accompanies in-person meetings, and drives negotiations forward, may have been lost in the digital void. This, coupled with the logistical and equity challenges brought about by the online format, made negotiations on the long list of agenda items, especially those that have proven contentious in the past, a challenging testing ground.

Notwithstanding these challenges, delegates still made progress on several substantive agenda items. This brief analysis will first consider some of the substantive issues that were tackled at SBSTTA-24 and talk about the larger procedural challenges, before pointing to ways they can hopefully be overcome on the road to the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) in Kunming, China.

As a compromise, may I suggest...

For all the firsts at SBSTTA-24, many of the substantive issues remained the same. For instance, the meeting marked the resumption of discussions on long-standing issues such as synthetic biology, where most delegates finally appeared to agree that it does not constitute a new and emerging issue. There also seemed to be broad support for the establishment of a multidisciplinary technical expert group to engage in horizon scanning to address emerging technologies. Still the conference room papers (CRPs) that were subject to text-based negotiations at the SBSTTA virtual plenaries remained littered with brackets, with many expressing concern about the implications for discussions at the COP.

Another long-standing contentious issue where differences remain was marine and coastal biodiversity, especially issues around ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). Some delegates lamented the decision not to prioritize this issue in plenary discussions, with marine biodiversity shifted from the last day of

the second plenary block to the last day of the third, just to run out of time for proper consideration. With regard to the substance of some of these issues, one seasoned delegate pointed out since these discussions are ultimately more political than technical, the Subsidiary Body on Implementation (SBI) may have been the more appropriate platform for these debates.

This brought to the fore a tension in the way the discussions around the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) has taken priority over other agenda items. This focus on what many considered a still weak GBF has made some delegates fear what may get lost is the essence of the CBD itself. These concerns also stem from a feeling that parties have collectively lowered their ambition levels and stepped back from committing to what is needed to enable transformative change. Simultaneously, according to countless statements by delegates and observers, the current GBF zero draft does not adequately reflect a number of substantive issues at the core of the CBD, such as marine and soil biodiversity, and benefit-sharing.

This makes the report by the Co-Chairs of the SBSTTA contact group on the GBF all the more important, with the hope that the positions expressed therein will be incorporated into the next draft of the GBF. What remains to be seen is the approach at this stage of drafting, with one seasoned participant noting that it could go down in one of two ways: the first is an ambitious re-drafting with fundamental changes to the text, and the second is an easier, “safer” path of re-working the zero draft, which many feel is too watered down. Judging from the outcomes of the contact group on this issue, parties are expecting the former of these options. As a result, arguably the most significant outcome of SBSTTA-24 is the input by parties and observers to the report of the Co-Chairs of the contact group that will be forwarded to the Co-Chairs of the Open-ended Working Group (WG) on the GBF to inform the next draft.

Hello? Can you hear me? My video isn't working but...

One thing on everyone's mind throughout the SBSTTA meetings was the obvious challenges that come with virtual negotiations. Granted, going online has meant greater access, and the ability to have more representatives on delegations, making one-party delegations a rarity, when in the past that was the only option many parties had due to travel funding. On the other hand, pressure has mounted on delegates to follow more agenda items than usual, which proved overwhelming, especially for those following the negotiations on top their usual full-time commitments, often outside of regular work hours.

The issue of connectivity plagued the sessions, which not only made it challenging for participants to deliver statements, but also to follow text-based negotiations and the approval of texts. In reflecting on this, it becomes clear that greater access, in the sheer number of registered participants, does not equate more effective participation.

As with the informal SBSTTA sessions earlier in 2021, observers also expressed frustration at not always having the opportunity to speak. Virtual meetings make it all the more difficult for observers to seek and gain support from delegations for their proposals. The mere loss of the corridor spaces has left those seeking support for proposals dependent on text messages or email, that is if the names and contact information of delegates are even known. In this sense, virtual meetings undermine the usual avenues for public participation in the CBD, otherwise known for its uniquely inclusive formats.

Finally, issues of time zones have been glaring throughout, with all plenary sessions and the majority of contact group sessions taken place at times that suit some regions more than others. This has meant that some, primarily those based in the Asia-Pacific region, have sat up well past midnight or early in the morning for most of SBSTTA-24, including contact and Friends of the Chair groups. Many thought this problem could be addressed by simply shifting the timing of some contact groups to accommodate those in the Asia-Pacific region. Instead, this created an unexpected issue when participation in those sessions almost halved. This brings up the question of, in a global setting where circumstances vary significantly from region to region, are those accustomed with certain comforts ready to share the burden?

All things considered, it is not surprising that the many “firsts” of SBSTTA-24, from a procedural perspective, left many participants exhausted. The virtual space, the continuous early morning or late evenings, the need to constantly juggle multiple agenda items, countries playing hard ball, and the sometimes slow progress that continues to plague certain agenda items depleted the usual energy in the room that often drives discussions forward. A number of participants also highlighted that the usual negotiating style of some delegates, asking to bracket parts to build compromise packages later, have ultimately hindered constructive dialogue.

Given that the next GBF WG is expected to meet in a virtual format, many are holding their breath to see whether and how some of these issues can be addressed. Notwithstanding the substantive aspects up for discussion, with the GBF WG Co-Chairs facing a big task ahead in putting together the first official draft, there are real fears that these discussions may be hindered by what now appear to be inherent procedural challenges.

Going from virtual to in-person COP15

The pandemic has brought numerous challenges into our lives, and multilateral negotiations were never going to get away easy. What the past six weeks of virtual negotiations have shown is that the road to Kunming will require some form of in-person meetings, so that participants can address unresolved issues. Thus, SBSTTA-24 participants have acknowledged that it will require at least four more days of in-person meetings to address remaining substantive issues. The same can be expected for the GBF WG, which will likely not be able to adopt a final outcome until they can meet in person. While the online experimentation has generated some comfort and the meeting saw some progress, it is clear that the virtual setting cannot replace in-person meetings and the success of COP15 and the GBF hangs in the balance.

Upcoming Meetings

Eighth Session of the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES): This virtual meeting will consider, for approval, the scoping report for the nexus assessment and a thematic transformative change assessment. It will also consider interim work plans of the IPBES task force for the intersessional period 2021-2022, as well as financial and budgetary arrangements. **dates:** 14-24 June 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://ipbes.net/>

Third meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: The Working Group will continue negotiations on the post-2020 global biodiversity

framework based on a first draft of the framework that will be circulated six weeks before the meeting. **dates:** 2-7 August 2021 **location:** virtual **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/WG2020-03>

IUCN World Conservation Congress 2020: The IUCN Congress will be a key milestone for nature conservation and the development of a new global framework for biodiversity. **dates:** 3-11 September 2021 **location:** Marseille, France, and virtual **www:** <https://www.iucncongress2020.org/>

2021 UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP 15): The 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the CBD, the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, and the 4th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit-sharing are scheduled to take place to review the achievement and delivery of the CBD's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. It is also expected to take a final decision on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, as well as decisions on related topics, including capacity building and resource mobilization. **dates:** 11- 24 October 2021 (TBC) **location:** Kunming, China **www:** <https://www.cbd.int/meetings/>

For additional upcoming events, see <http://sdg.iisd.org/>

Glossary

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| AHTEG | <i>Ad hoc</i> Technical Expert Group |
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| CEE | Central and Eastern Europe |
| COP | Conference of the Parties |
| CRP | Conference room paper |
| DSI | Digital sequence information |
| EBSA | Ecologically or biologically significant marine area |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN |
| GBF | Post-2020 global biodiversity framework |
| GBO | Global Biodiversity Outlook |
| GEF | Global Environment Facility |
| GYBN | Global Youth Biodiversity Network |
| IIFB | International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity |
| IPBES | Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services |
| IPCC | Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change |
| LMOs | Living modified organisms |
| SBI | Subsidiary Body on Implementation |
| SBSTTA | Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice |
| UNCCD | UN Convention to Combat Desertification |
| UNCLOS | UN Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| UNEP | UN Environment Programme |
| UNPFII | UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues |
| WG | Working Group |
| WHO | World Health Organization |