Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG 1.2 Highlights: Thursday, 2 February 2023

There was considerable focus on the intersessional work required to help realize a successful Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) process in 2024. Work proceeded in contact groups throughout the day, before delegates came together to hear updates in the late afternoon.

Contact Groups

Scope and Functions: In the morning, co-chaired by Marine Collignon, a lengthy discussion ensued regarding a statement in the circulated text, that “the contact group agreed that the proposed objective and functions of the panel should be further complemented by operating principles to be further developed during the intersessional period.” Noting that there were differing views expressed, the document listed elements to consider when developing operating principles, such as: the delivery of policy-relevant scientific evidence without being policy prescriptive; the contribution of Indigenous and traditional knowledge; a human rights approach; and the promotion of innovation, transparency, inclusivity, and complementarity.

Some member states emphasized that such elements and their interlinkages with operating principles had been discussed but not agreed upon, further stressing that this discussion would be beyond the contact group’s mandate to focus on scope and functions. The group decided to park these elements.

Delegates focused on the panel’s objective, which, albeit bracketed, reflected members states’ common understanding on strengthening the science-policy interface to contribute to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution for the protection of human health and the environment, and then listing several functions.

One delegate reiterated the desire to refer either to “all forms of pollution” or further clarify pollution by adding “including pollution related to chemicals, waste, and releases to air, water, soil, and the oceans.” Some member states expressed a preference for retaining the language from Resolution 5/8. Following discussion, the contact group agreed to park the proposed language alongside the other elements that require further discussion. The objective remained bracketed, with Co-Chair Collignon saying that the current formulation offers “a strong basis for consensus.”

On intersessional work, Co-Chair David Kapindula encouraged delegates to put forward suggestions that would be passed on to the contact group dealing with the organization of work. Delegates called for preparatory work during the intersessional period on the panel’s: horizon scanning and potential capacity-building functions; institutional design and governance structures; and operating principles, focusing on elements identified by the contact group. One delegate suggested the intersessional work could address establishing a possible support mechanism related to the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM).

Organization of Work: Co-Chair Ana Berejiani opened the session in the morning, stating that, following requests by member states, the Secretariat had prepared and circulated a draft outline of a zero draft, indicating all relevant elements and documents to be considered at OEWG 2 and 3.

Bob Watson, former Chair of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), offered insights on the draft outline. He emphasized that some elements, such as institutional design and governance, rules of procedure, and operating principles, are interrelated and should be considered together. He underscored key elements in the structures of several science-policy bodies, focusing particularly on the functions of plenaries, subsidiary bodies, and bureaus. Watson then presented the procedures for completing the panel’s functions, highlighting:

- procedures for receiving and prioritizing requests, suggesting that they could be assisted by a priority-setting framework and a conceptual framework;
- procedures for the preparation of panel deliverables, including engagement with experts, review, acceptance, and approval of assessments, and ensuring transparency and impartiality;
- procedures for horizon scanning, suggesting they need to be agile;
- policy on conflict of interest, drawing attention to the fact that, regarding chemicals, waste, and pollution, the private sector holds much of the data and information;
- procedures to safeguard commercially sensitive information; and
- financial procedures for the panel.

The Secretariat introduced the outline of the zero draft, noting its purpose to list the documents that the OEWG needs to present to the intergovernmental meeting at the end of the process. He emphasized that the document drew from relevant IPBES and IPCC documents, saying the outcomes of the contact group on scope and functions would also be used to populate the document. He invited member states to discuss: what the OEWG should develop and what could be left for the panel to finalize; what elements should be discussed at OEWG 2 and 3; and the type of outputs envisaged.

Several delegates asked for clarification on which items listed in the draft outline would be prerequisites to establishing the new
suggested webinars and informal consultations. Another group
list of sub-items contained in the document. One regional group
keep the items as they appear in Resolution 5/8 and remove a
questions member states would like the panel to be able to handle.

One delegate, supported by several others, called for a process of
document including examples/options will be discussed at OEWG
rules of procedure from other science-policy bodies as working
finalizing it at OEWG 2. Two delegates suggested using the
need to be addressed intersessionally.

Another delegate urged a decision on the specific intersessional
work needed, noting 10 or 11 months remaining before OEWG
saying the bulk of OEWG’s work should be addressed at OEWG
One member state presented a proposal that built on the
OEWG should at least start discussions on all listed items. One
began the apple of discord. It isn’t necessarily chemical or waste
frequency of chemicals and waste, which could narrow the panel’s focus
understandings. For some delegates, “pollution” is pollution linked
chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution for the protection of
principle, that the panel’s objective is to strengthen the science-
may not be out of reach. Member states agreed, at least in
as a participant noted. Significant progress hinted that consensus
“interesting conclusions were drawn, both positive and negative,”
as a participant noted. Significant progress hinted that consensus
may not be out of reach. Member states agreed, at least in
principle, that the panel’s objective is to strengthen the science-
policy interface to contribute to the sound management of
chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution for the protection of
human health and the environment.

But discussions on the term “pollution” uncovered divergent
understandings. For some delegates, “pollution” is pollution linked
to chemicals and waste, which could narrow the panel’s focus
to chemical and waste pollution. Other delegates insisted that
also other forms of pollution should be addressed. Air pollution
became the apple of discord. It isn’t necessarily chemical or waste
pollution, but for some, it is necessary for the panel to address.
With one day left, some were still wondering what outcomes are
possible today, to lead to future successes.

The summary and analysis of OEWG 1-2 will be available
Monday, 6 February 2023, at: enb.iisd.org/oewg1-2-science-
policy-panel-contribute-further-sound-management-chemicals-
waste-prevent-pollution