

SBSTTA 26 Highlights: Wednesday, 15 May 2024

The 26th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 26) continued its deliberations, focusing on marine and coastal biodiversity, and on the interlinkages between biodiversity and health. The contact group on the monitoring framework for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) held its second session in the evening.

Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

Delegates resumed Tuesday's discussions. GERMANY, supported by PORTUGAL and others, emphasized that the momentum created through the adoption of the GBF and the Agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement) must be harnessed for substantive progress. ITALY, CHILE, SPAIN, and FRANCE encouraged parties to ratify the BBNJ Agreement.

TÜRKIYE, as a non-party to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), stressed that UNCLOS is not the only legal framework regulating ocean activities. Others, including BRAZIL and GREECE, highlighted UNCLOS' central role for the conservation and sustainable use of the ocean and its resources.

On ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs), CUBA, NEW ZEALAND, PORTUGAL, SOUTH AFRICA, CHILE, FINLAND, and many others supported the draft recommendation and the modalities for modifying EBSA descriptions and describing new ones, stressing the need for coherence and coordination with the BBNJ Agreement. SPAIN, NEW ZEALAND, AUSTRALIA, and CHILE underscored the importance of EBSAs for implementing the GBF and the BBNJ Agreement.

BRAZIL lamented that their contributions in expert workshops were not taken into account. GABON expressed concerns regarding the process' complexity. PORTUGAL, GABON, CUBA, and others supported extending the informal advisory group's term and reflecting the decision to postpone voluntary guidelines on the peer-review process in the draft recommendation.

TÜRKIYE stressed that EBSA processes are scientific and technical in nature and should not prejudge disputes regarding maritime zones delimitations. BRAZIL noted that EBSAs should not prejudge decisions under the BBNJ Agreement. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA and INDIA stressed the need for appropriate prior consultation and institutional mechanisms to resolve issues among concerned parties during the EBSA process. SINGAPORE requested further discussion on jurisdictional issues and the right of parties to oppose modifications.

COLOMBIA and AUSTRALIA called for further information exchange and to include traditional knowledge of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs). CHILE stressed the need to follow the precautionary approach and, with others, to restrict marine geo-engineering projects.

On marine and coastal biodiversity, many delegates welcomed the draft recommendation, stressing the importance of marine

and coastal biodiversity as a cross-cutting element of the GBF. DJIBOUTI, COLOMBIA, and INDIA called for additional efforts and research to address different types of pollution.

SPAIN, MOROCCO, FRANCE, and others urged strengthening cooperation and collaboration with competent international organizations. PORTUGAL suggested references to relevant UN-wide strategies. AUSTRALIA and CHILE stressed the need to avoid duplication with other agreements.

NEW ZEALAND and SOUTH AFRICA urged timely adoption of the annex containing gaps and areas requiring additional focus. COLOMBIA called for concrete mechanisms to address gaps and for recognizing the roles of IPLCs. AUSTRALIA highlighted the need to address "often-overlooked" issues of small island developing states. FINLAND suggested adding light pollution and other electromagnetic radiation to the gaps list. CAMEROON proposed an amendment to clarify criteria for "best" available science.

BRAZIL, CUBA, DJIBOUTI, SUDAN, GABON, CHILE, and others highlighted the need for capacity building, technology transfer, and adequate financial resources for effective implementation. BRAZIL added that developing additional guidance material would be premature.

SAUDI ARABIA suggested clarifying responsibilities and relevant mandates regarding the protection of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction. DJIBOUTI and FRANCE stressed the importance of blue carbon ecosystems, while BRAZIL suggested deleting the reference. INDIA emphasized the role of coastal communities and maintaining the balance between conservation and sustainable livelihood goals. The REPUBLIC OF KOREA and FRANCE supported continued work under the Sustainable Ocean Initiative.

The GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK (GYBN), the INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB), and the CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS called for ensuring the full and effective participation of IPLCs, women, children, youth, elders, knowledge holders, and persons with disabilities in programmes of work and in work on EBSAs, with IIFB urging the inclusion of traditional knowledge. The CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS emphasized a human rights-based approach and, with the CBD ALLIANCE, the precautionary approach. The major groups called for further work on, among others, the threats of deep-sea mining and marine geo-engineering.

Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations expressed their readiness to collaborate, including on data for marine and coastal biodiversity and experiences with area-based management measures. They suggested further work on: human rights and environmental defenders; and pollution, including plastic and noise pollution.

Biodiversity and Health

Marina von Weissenberg (Finland) chaired the discussions. The Secretariat introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/8, which contains: the draft recommendation; the draft global action plan on biodiversity and health (Annex I), with actions for mainstreaming biodiversity and health interlinkages into GBF implementation; targeted messages for mainstreaming biodiversity into the health sector (Annex II), followed by monitoring elements (enclosure

1); and biodiversity and health interlinkages identified for health promotion and disease prevention (enclosure 2).

FIJI, NORWAY, MEXICO, the REPUBLIC OF KOREA, SWITZERLAND, EGYPT, SOUTH AFRICA, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC), the UK, CHINA, the PHILIPPINES, MALAYSIA, KENYA, and others supported adopting the action plan at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16), with CANADA suggesting adding references to genetic diversity if negotiations are reopened. CHINA called for constructive dialogue to facilitate the plan's adoption.

Burkina Faso for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported by SUDAN, NIGERIA, SOMALIA, BURUNDI, ZIMBABWE, SOUTH AFRICA, UGANDA, MALAWI, TANZANIA, NAMIBIA, KENYA, and GHANA, urged benefit sharing, including regarding traditional knowledge related to genetic resources, and supported adopting the action plan with amendments, including focusing support on guidance and tool development; capacity building, and expertise sharing; and further work on the monitoring indicators.

MALAWI supported referring to the contributions of genetic resources from digital sequence information (DSI) among the targeted messages for mainstreaming biodiversity in the health sector. NIGERIA highlighted the importance of nature-based solutions to address biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution. SOUTH AFRICA suggested considering: links to other multilateral fora; access and benefit sharing (ABS) related to DSI on genetic resources; the One Welfare approach; and the One Food initiative. ZIMBABWE highlighted health issues affecting IPLCs and other vulnerable groups. EGYPT queried the cost of implementing the proposed action plan and called for an ethical indicator.

BELGIUM, the NETHERLANDS, SWEDEN, GERMANY, AUSTRIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, and the EU urged adopting the action plan with amendments to ensure better alignment with the GBF. BELGIUM and FINLAND suggested moving biodiversity and health interlinkages from enclosure 2 to the draft recommendation, and proposed further work on indicators. The NETHERLANDS and GERMANY called for a whole-of-society approach, in line with the rights-based approach.

AUSTRIA, the NETHERLANDS, and GYBN asked to list "children" alongside "youth" throughout the document. The UK stressed that references to human rights should reflect language agreed in the GBF and suggested, with SOUTH AFRICA, EGYPT, and UGANDA, designating national focal points on a voluntary basis. SWEDEN, GERMANY, and SPAIN requested stronger language regarding drivers threatening both biodiversity and human health.

COLOMBIA emphasized that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the importance of integrating human and animal health with human rights, including the right to a clean and healthy environment. FINLAND also pointed to lessons learned from COVID-19. COLOMBIA urged for a flexible, cross-cutting, and inclusive framework for all biodiversity-related conventions. INDONESIA, supported by NAMIBIA, stressed synergies with the ongoing World Health Organization (WHO) pandemic agreement negotiations, urging a precautionary approach to avoid prejudice.

MEXICO highlighted traditional knowledge and Indigenous health, underscoring the interconnection between biodiversity, health, traditional medicine, and spirituality. With the NETHERLANDS, he urged recognizing conditions that may cause zoonotic outbreaks. GHANA and others suggested further work on invasive alien species and biological alternatives to fight disease vectors.

PERU, COLOMBIA, SWITZERLAND, the NETHERLANDS, the PHILIPPINES, the DRC, UGANDA, GERMANY, SPAIN, EGYPT, SOMALIA, FINLAND, FRANCE, and others urged using the One Health approach on mainstreaming and highlighted its close links with the GBF. BANGLADESH and MALAYSIA suggested including health benefits of biodiversity in education. FIJI underscored the negative effects of environmental degradation

and biodiversity loss on human health. TANZANIA underscored the importance of healthy agricultural systems.

ARGENTINA called for clear references to means of implementation and, with SWEDEN, revisions to reflect agreed language, notably on references to IPLCs and traditional knowledge. GUATEMALA urged removing references to validation in provisions on traditional knowledge, as these could violate Indigenous rights.

BRAZIL, supported by INDONESIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, expressed serious concerns, saying the draft action plan fails to address benefit sharing and DSI; includes new concepts that are still under development or consideration, including some that may fall under areas in other international organizations' purview, namely the WHO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN. INDONESIA advised avoiding any mandatory language on the One Health approach. JAPAN noted that benefit sharing from DSI is still under discussion in other CBD processes.

Pointing to the reciprocal relationship between biodiversity and health, IIFB called for respect of, among others, customary laws, Indigenous doctors and healers, and traditional health systems. The CBD WOMEN'S CAUCUS pointed to greater health risks for women as primary caregivers, and with UN WOMEN, urged adding references to sexual and reproductive health. Noting that the youngest generations carry the greatest mental health burden due to eco-anxiety, GYBN, with the UN OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS, urged strengthened references to the rights to a healthy environment and health. The CBD ALLIANCE urged the draft action plan include ABS.

The UN Environment Programme indicated support for implementing the global action plan through a trust fund, urging more donations. Intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations expressed their readiness to support interlinkages, including on: chemical pollution; the One Health approach; and addressing differentiated health impacts for disadvantaged groups.

Discussions will continue in a contact group co-chaired by Jahidul Kabir (Bangladesh) and Barbara Engels (Germany).

Contact Group on the Monitoring Framework

The contact group on the GBF monitoring framework, co-chaired by Anne Teller (EU) and Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico), heard reports on the discussions held earlier in the day in two Friends of the Chair groups (facilitated by New Zealand and South Africa) on Targets 13 (benefit-sharing) and 17 (biosafety). It then continued its work addressing issues on the proposed binary indicators, starting with Target 12 (biodiversity-inclusive urban planning). Delegates spent the evening discussing outstanding targets, in order to prepare a conference room paper for consideration in plenary.

In the Breezeways

Arriving at the UN Nairobi campus on day three, which also marks the mid-point of the SBSTTA meeting, delegates got straight to work, tackling the outstanding agenda items in plenary: marine and coastal biodiversity, and biodiversity and health. Keenly aware of the significant work that awaits them over the coming days, as they prepared for more detailed discussion in contact groups, delegates sought to balance the need for progress with feasibility.

Following complaints about two contact groups running in parallel the night before — "as a matter of necessity" — only one ran on Wednesday night to the relief of smaller delegations, with one delegate saying "let us hope this sets a precedent." This respite will not last long, however, as the contact groups on synthetic biology and marine and coastal biodiversity will run in parallel on Thursday morning until plenary resumes in the afternoon. Commenting on the broad support heard in plenary on the modalities for modifying EBSA descriptions and describing new ones, some seasoned negotiators were not yet ready to celebrate, pointing out that it remained to be seen how it would all unfold in the contact group.