

SBSTTA 26 Highlights: Saturday, 18 May 2024

The 26th meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA 26) concluded its deliberations, adopting recommendations to the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 16) on: risk assessment and risk management; synthetic biology; marine and coastal issues, including on further work on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs) and on the conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity; biodiversity and health; and the monitoring framework for the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF).

SBSTTA 26 further adopted, with minor revisions, final recommendations on the agenda items concluded on Friday, namely: matters related to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.2); scientific and technical needs to support the implementation of the GBF (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.3); and the detection and identification of living modified organisms (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.4).

The contact groups on marine and coastal biodiversity, and the GBF monitoring framework, met in the morning, making progress, allowing for the swift adoption of the recommendations in closing plenary.

Risk Assessment and Risk Management

Chair Senka Barudanović (Bosnia and Herzegovina) introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.4. She clarified that, following divergent views heard in plenary on the development of additional guidance regarding living modified fish, all relevant elements were in brackets, as these issues will be addressed during the 11th meeting of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties (COP/MOP 11) to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

BRAZIL, INDIA, EGYPT, MOLDOVA, FRANCE, the DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC), SOUTH AFRICA, FINLAND, and MALAWI provided amendments, which were approved with brackets.

The conference room paper (CRP) was approved with these and minor amendments. The final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.5) was adopted with minor revisions.

Synthetic Biology

Chair Barudanović introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.5. She noted that the relevant contact group met three times and reached general agreement on sections on capacity building and development, access to and transfer of technology, and knowledge sharing. She underscored polarized discussions on: the continuation of the horizon scanning process; the establishment of an *ad hoc* technical expert group (AHTEG); and the next steps for the intersessional period. She stressed that the CRP is heavily bracketed and suggested deferring discussions to COP 16.

BELGIUM, supported by EGYPT and the DRC, noted that the CRP contained text introduced during contact group discussions without prior submission to plenary or in writing, calling for rules of procedure to be upheld, and to note this comment in the meeting's report.

The CRP, containing 65 sets of brackets, was approved. In closing plenary, the final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.6) was adopted with minor revisions.

Marine and Coastal Biodiversity

Further work on EBSAs: Chair Barudanović introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.7. The Secretariat introduced editorial revisions to the annex of the CRP on modalities for the modification of descriptions of EBSAs and the description of new areas, to reflect discussions in the contact groups, including: clarifying that a list of reasons for which modifications of EBSA descriptions can be made applies only to areas beyond national jurisdiction; that modifications to EBSA descriptions for areas within national jurisdiction can be made “by the State within whose jurisdiction the modification is proposed”; and to reflect agreement on granting parties the possibility to object to modifications of EBSAs or descriptions of new EBSAs “owing to the existence of a claim or dispute relating to sovereignty, sovereign rights or jurisdiction involving an area included in the submission,” in which case the submission does not advance to the repository or information-sharing mechanism (ISM). PORTUGAL requested introducing brackets to reflect divergence on whether modifications of EBSA descriptions encompass the “withdrawal” of descriptions.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION requested, without formally introducing the request in the document, that the Secretariat explore the option of preparing suggestions for modifying the terms of reference for the Informal Advisory Group on EBSAs for consideration at COP 16. He noted ongoing informal consultations on the process of notification and the receipt of comments upon submissions of modifications or descriptions of EBSAs within national jurisdiction to the ISM, and indicated that text would be prepared for COP 16.

TÜRKIYE reiterated its position regarding the footnote referring to its non-party status to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, with BRAZIL calling to bracket the relevant preambular text.

The CRP was approved with these amendments, with the annex remaining bracketed alongside the draft recommendation's provision relating to the annex.

The final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.7) was adopted with minor revisions.

Conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity: Chair Barudanović introduced CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.6/Rev.1, inviting parties to refrain from reopening discussion on pending issues that will be resolved at COP 16, and noted that the meeting's report would reflect that the annex to the document had not been discussed.

JAPAN, BRAZIL, the UK, TÜRKIYE, PORTUGAL, and NEW ZEALAND lamented that issues could not be resolved, with some noting that not all proposals were reflected in the CRP, and indicated that they would repeat their proposals on these matters at COP 16.

The CRP was approved.

In closing plenary, the final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.9) was adopted with minor revisions.

Biodiversity and Health

Chair Barudanović tabled the relevant document CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.8 noting that the contact group had discussed the global action plan on biodiversity and health (Annex I), including the table of actions for mainstreaming biodiversity and health interlinkages into GBF implementation; but had not been able to consider other annexes, which remain bracketed.

Regarding the preamble of the draft recommendation, delegates agreed to: delete references to “spiritual and emotional health,” while retaining those to physical and mental health; and to include a reference to consistency with the respective mandates of the organizations participating in the Quadripartite Alliance for One Health.

Delegates bracketed references to: information document [CBD/SBSTTA/26/INF/3](#) on drivers of biodiversity loss; interlinkages covered in the horizon scanning report by the multidisciplinary AHTEG on synthetic biology; and achieving a global approach for biodiversity and health.

Regarding text noting the importance given to biodiversity and health interlinkages by other organizations, delegates agreed to include a general reference to UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolution 5/6 (biodiversity and health). Agreement could not be reached on a more specific reference to the UNEA Resolution, as well as on how to refer to the Paris Agreement. Both references were bracketed.

ISRAEL proposed, opposed by the EU and BRAZIL, to add a reference to the current negotiations at the World Health Organization on a new pandemic agreement, which was included in brackets.

On the operational paragraphs, including a list of actions that parties are encouraged to take, in accordance with national circumstances and priorities, and on a voluntary basis, a bracketed provision on implementing the global action plan and providing information on activities and results thereof, was amended to include a reference to national reports, following a proposal by SPAIN.

JAPAN and BRAZIL, opposed by SWEDEN, suggested deleting a provision on the designation of national focal points on biodiversity and health. BRAZIL proposed replacing language on “Indigenous and traditional doctors or healers” with “traditional medicine systems,” and deleting references to “sharing best regulations” and on “biodiversity-related accounts.” The provision was bracketed. Language on the designation of a national youth liaison focal point was also bracketed following an intervention by JAPAN.

On language inviting governments, multilateral agreements, and international organizations to use the action plan, where appropriate, in mainstreaming biodiversity and health interlinkages, INDONESIA, ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, ISRAEL, the DRC, and SOMALIA provided amendments, with INDONESIA and others clarifying that all references to the global action plan should be bracketed, noting it is yet to be approved. The EU and FINLAND stressed that this request undermines SBSTTA’s long-standing work and noted concerns on bracketing language that was extensively discussed in the contact group, requesting this be included in the meeting’s report. The paragraph was bracketed in its entirety, alongside the one inviting Indigenous Peoples and local communities (IPLCs) to contribute to the action plan.

Following debate among GERMANY, ZIMBABWE, AUSTRALIA, the EU, ARGENTINA, CANADA, and the UK on text on providing financial and technical support for capacity building and development, the entire provision was bracketed.

On a provision requesting the Global Environment Facility to provide assistance to developing countries, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION requested directing assistance “to all eligible countries without prejudice,” opposed by BRAZIL. SYRIA suggested “without any discrimination or bias,” which was accepted. The provision was approved with brackets.

Provisions inviting parties and others to share measures, guidance and tools, examples, best practices, and lessons learned, as well as provisions detailing the requests to the Secretariat in the draft recommendation, were bracketed. BRAZIL and others requested the addition of a footnote noting insufficient time for reviewing these provisions.

Under the global action plan (Annex I), Chair Barudanović suggested not reopening the text. ARGENTINA requested a footnote stating that “the finalization of text currently in brackets may have implications for currently unbracketed text.” Following discussions, delegates approved Annex I with the proposed footnote.

Annex II on monitoring elements for the global action plan and Annex III on biodiversity and health interlinkages were bracketed. The CRP was approved with these amendments.

In closing plenary, the final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.8) was adopted with minor revisions.

Monitoring Framework for the GBF

Chair Barudanović tabled the relevant document CBD/SBSTTA/26/CRP.9 noting that it constituted compromise text resulting from the work of the contact group and suggesting not reopening discussions.

BRAZIL expressed concern that there was no chance to discuss Annex I containing GBF indicators in the contact group. Following long procedural discussions, BRAZIL introduced changes, previously raised in plenary. COLOMBIA asked to reinstitute disaggregation by funding source as in the original version of Annex I. All suggestions were included in brackets.

The CRP was approved with these changes.

The final recommendation (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.10) was adopted with minor revisions.

Adoption of the Report

Rapporteur Jean Bruno Mikissa (Gabon) introduced the meeting’s report (CBD/SBSTTA/26/L.1). Delegates adopted it with minor amendments and two requests to record motions by: COLOMBIA, on the way in which their proposals on Afro-descendent groups were addressed by the meeting; and ARGENTINA and the DRC, on noting the documents not yet available in all six UN languages at the time of adoption.

Closure of the Meeting

In closing remarks, Acting Executive Secretary David Cooper emphasized SBSTTA’s fundamental contributions in providing “the substance and the ideas that have driven this Convention forward,” and noted the value of its work in translating science into policy. Alongside expressing thanks to SBSTTA Chair Barudanović for her hard work, he acknowledged Véronique Allain, CBD Secretariat, for her unwavering support to the Convention over the last 23 SBSTTA meetings.

JORDAN thanked Acting Executive Secretary Cooper for his omnipresent support, noting that the work here is the fruit of his efforts. Delegates joined in a standing ovation.

The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY thanked all those who support the work of IPLCs in conserving nature.

The GLOBAL YOUTH BIODIVERSITY NETWORK expressed disappointment over the deletion of equity and a human rights-based approach as a potential topic for future work; and of references to spiritual and emotional health, urging bringing back ambition and a transformative drive.

The CBD WOMEN’S CAUCUS lamented the delay in the implementation of a gender-responsive approach to monitoring, urging increasing attention to human rights. COLOMBIA emphasized that COP 16 will send out a strong message for peace and nature. GABON, for all regions, thanked all who supported the meeting.

SBSTTA Chair Barudanović said she has never seen a SBSTTA with such a spirit of compromise, pointing to the body’s maturing, and noting that it is deeply connected to the work of Acting Executive Secretary Cooper. She gavelled the meeting to a close at 10:51 pm.

In the Breezeways

The afternoon plenary opened with fair weather reports from the morning’s contact group co-chairs, who noted the advances made and their predictions that the remaining (bracketed) issues could be resolved in due course. In stops and starts throughout afternoon and evening plenary sessions, as unforeseen storm clouds amassed and dispersed, delegates were able to approve the CRPs and draft recommendations tasked to them at a pace significantly faster than the day before, relieving tired delegates. Not all were equally impressed, however, with one seasoned delegate wondering “how are we going to resolve all of these brackets at COP 16?” and another questioning this “rubber-stamping exercise.”

Drenched participants streamed into plenary as night fell to finally cross the finish line. They left warmer and drier following the heartfelt acknowledgement given to Acting Executive Secretary Cooper, and all those present, which reminded delegates of the value of their work in propelling the Convention’s objectives forward.