

Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG-3.2 Highlights: Sunday, 15 June 2025

Delegates resumed work to finalize recommendations for a new science-policy panel focused on the sound management of chemicals and waste, and the prevention of pollution. After the morning plenary, work focused on the set of deliverables necessary to establish the panel.

Opening of the Meeting

OEWG Chair Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) highlighted the task ahead to finalize the foundational document and draft rules of procedures, urging delegates to use their time wisely to reach this goal. She welcomed the 98 governments and 35 observer organizations registered.

Edgardo Ortuño Silva, Minister of the Environment, Uruguay, noted the historic opportunity to create a mechanism to channel scientific knowledge to policymakers, similar to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). He called for an agile set-up that allows the panel to develop organically while including a range of actors, including women and other vulnerable groups. Underscoring Uruguay's commitment to multilateralism and living in peace with nature, he recalled advice from José Mujica, former President of Uruguay, to avoid conflating hyper-consumption with progress.

Inger Andersen, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), stressed that the panel is not a treaty and will not impose obligations on Member States. She suggested that the operating principles are already stated in United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) Resolution 5/8 that established the panel. She urged parties to determine the question of voting or consensus urgently, suggesting it could unlock other issues. She stated that discussions on terminology of the panel's governing body or plenary could be readily resolved and said that financial arrangements and strategic partnerships decisions do not need to be fine-tuned before the panel's establishment.

Andersen identified key points for deliberation, including determining whether membership should be automatically open to all Member States or whether governments decide to join when they are ready, and how best to incorporate the knowledge of observers. She stated that UNEP expects to serve as the Secretariat, drawing upon the competencies and expertise of other UN agencies, but that this should not "distract" delegates in their deliberations.

Organizational Matters

Election of Officers: Chair Alkemade noted that officers were previously elected and still in office.

Adoption of the Agenda: Delegates agreed to the proposed organization of work ([SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/INF/8](#)). Chair Alkemade recalled that the agenda had been adopted at OEWG 3.1 ([SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/1/Rev.1](#)).

Preparation of Proposals for the Establishment of the Panel

Chair Alkemade introduced the relevant documents ([SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/5](#); [SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/6](#); [SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/7](#); and [INF/9](#)), which include the foundational document, draft rules of procedure, recommendations for the intersessional period and other draft decisions and proposals.

Chair Alkemade invited opening statements from regional groups and stakeholders.

China, for the ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, highlighted commitment to establishing the panel and called for: grounding decisions in consensus and making use of voting exclusively to elect officers; equal representation of developed and developing countries, including on the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC); enabling the full membership of the State of Palestine; allowing voluntary financial contributions; aligning the scope with UNEA Resolution 5/8; and specifying UNEP as the secretariat host.

Nigeria, for the AFRICAN REGION, urged meeting the expectations for this meeting to enable the establishment of the panel, noting regret about missing the deadline last year. They supported equal representation of both developed and developing countries in the IEC's membership, urged gender inclusiveness and responsiveness, and highlighted the importance of agreeing on interim arrangements for a secretariat.

The EU supported the scope outlined in the UNEA mandate, noting that operating principles should be concise, simple, and clear to guide the panel's work, and that membership should be available to regional economic integration organizations. They emphasized the importance of a recognizable name for the panel to help raise awareness and uptake of recommendations and called for the first session of the panel to convene within one year of its establishment.

In a joint statement, MAJOR GROUPS underscored that for the panel to be successful, there should be formal mechanisms for the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs), including multidisciplinary scientists to share their knowledge and evidence that will contribute to effective policy making. They called for observers' participations in the IEC to deliver policy-relevant advice that is gender-sensitive and responds to "real-world needs" with the highest standards of transparency.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH highlighted the importance of integrating intergenerational equity in the panel's work as a moral imperative and practical tool to strengthen the horizon scanning function. Noting that decisions, actions, and inactions of today have an intergenerational multiplier effect, they urged a human rights approach to include the voices of those least heard.

The INTERNATIONAL POLLUTANTS ELIMINATION NETWORK (IPEN) (edited) emphasized the importance of early participation and inclusion of civil society organizations (CSOs) to ensure meaningful engagement throughout the panel's development and work, thereby building trust and transparency in the panel's outputs and making its recommendations more credible. They called for the panel's work to be publicly available and accessible.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES noted the disproportionate impact on Indigenous Peoples and recalled UNEA Resolution 5/8 highlights their role. They called for: the inclusion of text in the decision's preamble and foundational document affirming the commitment to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples; a minimum of two seats in the IEC; and the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples review committee.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO) said health must be central to the panel's work and urged pragmatism. They emphasized the WHO's commitment to contribute technically and through secretariat support, and its readiness to finalize the joint secretariat model building on proposals from OEWG 3.1.

The OEWG established three contact groups:

- contact group 1, co-facilitated by Toks Akinseye (UK) and Miguel Eduardo Ruiz Botero (Colombia), to address the foundational document, focusing on membership and functions of the bodies of the panel, decision-making and related rules of procedure;
- contact group 2, co-facilitated by Keima Gardiner (Trinidad and Tobago) and Kateřina Šebková (Czechia), to finalize the elements not considered by contact group 1, including other foundational elements and related rules of procedure, and the draft decision to establish the panel; and
- contact group 3, co-facilitated by Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) and Itsuki Kuroda (Japan), to take up other rules of procedure, the draft decision to forward the draft rules, procedures and policies to the governing body of the panel, and a draft decision on arrangements for the interim period.

Contact Groups

Membership and Functions of Bodies, Decision Making, and Related Rules of Procedure: Co-Facilitators Toks Akinseye (UK) and Miguel Eduardo Ruiz Botero (Colombia), outlined the group's mandate to address membership and functions of the panel's bodies, decision-making and related rules of procedure.

Decision-making: Noting that these provisions are particularly sensitive for many delegations, Co-Facilitator Botero invited general views on a proposed operating principle and the related draft rules of procedure on consensus in the decision-making process on substantive matters.

Many participants supported taking decisions on matters of substance by consensus. Views diverged on whether to provide the opportunity to allow taking decisions by vote if all efforts to achieve consensus have been exhausted. Some participants supported voting as a fallback option, with one noting that this could help to unlock situations and prevent the use of consensus procedures as a veto. Many delegates rejected the option of voting

on matters of substance, with one noting that voting on science would undermine the panel's legitimacy.

One delegate urged not intervening in the scientific process, highlighting that the governing body should not make decisions on scientific matters but leave this to scientists and provide their views during the review process. Reiterating that the panel is not a multilateral environmental agreement (MEA), Co-Facilitator Botero proposed that the panel have the same decision-making mechanisms on matters of substance as IPBES does, which prioritize consensus without an option for voting, noting that these "may not be perfect, but they are fit for purpose."

The decision on whether voting could be allowed on substantive matters when all efforts to achieve consensus have been exhausted, and whether to include consensus in decision-making as an operating principle was parked.

Institutional arrangements: Delegates decided to delete a chapeau paragraph that provided an overview of all bodies that constitute the panel.

Plenary: On the use of nomenclature to refer to the decision-making body of the panel as the "governing body" or "plenary," delegates disagreed, with one noting that, like IPBES, plenary refers to the panel's decision-making body. Another delegate, supported by others, stated that "plenary" refers to a "type of meeting" where decisions are made, rather than the decision-making body itself. Upon further discussion, delegates agreed upon titling the paragraph "Decision-making and Governing Body of the Panel" with text specifying that "the plenary is the governing and decision-making body of the panel."

Membership: Delegates agreed to open membership to UN non-member observer states and that states need to opt in by expressing their intention for membership. Views diverged on membership of regional economic integration organizations.

Participation of observers: Delegates agreed to include a revised paragraph in the text specifying that NGOs with consultative status within the UN are entitled to participate as observers in the plenary. One delegate suggested alternate text reflecting that the meeting of the plenary is open to participation by observers, "including non-member states, international organizations, specialized agencies and related organizations and NGOs." Several delegates requested maintaining reference to Indigenous Peoples, as they are disproportionately affected by chemicals, waste, and pollution. One observer stressed that the use of NGOs does not cover all CSOs and suggested either considering Major Groups or Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, and other relevant organizations. A delegate opposed alternate text, stressing that participation of observers should be limited to the draft rules of procedure rather than in the foundational document. Upon lengthy debate, Co-Facilitator Botero suggested simplifying text in the foundational document to state that "the plenary is open to participation by observers, subject to the rules of procedure," with further text bracketed.

Functions of the Plenary: Views diverged on: solicitation and response to submissions and requests for the work programme, with one participant insisting that only proposals for work programme activities from governments that are members of the panel should be considered; the inclusion of input from stakeholders for the work programme; and the adoption and amendment of rules of procedure and financial rules and procedures by consensus. The text was parked for further consideration.

Bureau: Following a discussion on whether the bureau should be established to “provide oversight of the panel” or “to oversee the implementation of decisions of the plenary”, the group decided to simply state “A bureau is established.”

Discussions continued into the night.

Other Foundational Elements, Related Rules of Procedure, and Decision to Establish the Panel: In the contact group, Co-Facilitators Keima Gardiner (Trinidad and Tobago) and Kateřina Šebková (Czechia) confirmed the mandate included:

- Panel’s name;
- Preamble;
- Scope, objective, and functions of the panel;
- Secretariat;
- Financial arrangements;
- Operating principles and approaches;
- Strategic partnerships; and
- Evaluation of operational effectiveness and impact of the panel.

The group agreed to delete the preamble.

Secretariat services: There was some support for a broad suggestion to allow the panel to secure secretariat services at its first meeting. Some held firm that UNEP should provide services alone, noting that delegates could not agree at OEWG 3.1 to provide a formal role to the WHO. Others wanted to leave the door open for collaboration with other organizations, not only the WHO. Suggestions to allocate administrative services to UNEP, or to task the panel with assessing arrangements in the future, did not resolve the impasse.

There was general agreement that the secretariat should be hosted in a single location.

Financial arrangements: There was some discussion on the technically correct way to express the establishment of a trust fund, given that the usual process is for the panel to request the Executive Director of UNEP to do so. UNEP explained that this would also need a decision on the hosting institution, but that such a decision is not needed in the foundational document.

The group agreed that a trust fund “will be” established. Co-Facilitator Šebková suggested deleting the rest of the section given that it is not essential to the establishment of the fund, but some parties called for keeping some elements, in particular on ensuring that contributions to the trust fund do not come with conditionalities, orient the work of the panel, and/or are earmarked. On the latter, concerns were expressed that exceptions would be required for funds to be allocated for agreed activities, given donors’ internal budget allocations. Language was proposed on having exceptions to earmarking for specific elements of a work programme approved by the plenary. A small group was tasked to consult informally on this language, as well as whether these elements would be better addressed in the financial arrangements.

Operating principles and approaches: The contact group agreed to move the options related to human rights to the draft decision that will establish the panel. There was recognition that a proposed principle to address all forms of pollution was closely related to the scope. This link prompted some to suggest its deletion or relocation to the scope section, to ensure the panel addresses legacy pollution issues. Saying it was analogous to how IPBES’ operating principles clarify the scope, a delegate supported keeping this as a principle to help clarify the relevant media (chemicals, waste, and pollution) and compartments (air, water,

and soil). The group moved the paragraph to the preamble of the draft decision.

The group parked the proposed principle to integrate capacity building into all aspects of the panel’s work after one party objected to its inclusion unless it specified scientific and technological capacity building.

Delegates added brackets to the previously clean text on the principle for taking an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that incorporates a broad range of relevant disciplines and sources. The debate centred on how to incorporate sectoral expertise, which some viewed as a complement to academic knowledge that could include the expertise of workers or others in economic sectors. Others questioned who would determine what sectoral expertise would be appropriate, and one preferred specifying “scientific, technical, and socio-economic” expertise instead of sectoral.

Other Draft Rules of Procedure, and Draft Decisions to Forward Rules, Procedures and Policies: Co-facilitated by Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) and Itsuki Kuroda (Japan), the contact group took up the draft decisions on arrangements for the interim period and on forwarding the draft rules, procedures and policies. Co-Facilitator Kuroda recalled that the text on interim arrangements had not been discussed before and after the secretariat introduced the text ([SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/8](#)), the contact group exchanged general views.

Delegates discussed, *inter alia*: bureau involvement; trust fund arrangements; observer participation in the first meeting of the panel as stated in the rules of procedure; the date and venue of the panel’s first meeting; and reference to governing body or plenary.

The group agreed to the first paragraph requesting UNEP to provide the interim secretariat supporting the operation of the panel, but brackets were added to the preamble after a question was raised on the welcoming of proposals from the OEWG and on secretariat arrangements. Discussions continued into the night.

In the Corridors

A year after delegates failed to conclude their work, expectations were high. Even participants at the recent UN Ocean Conference called on their OEWG counterparts to realize this new science-policy panel. A more tempered, or “pragmatic” tone met these broad ambitions. For many, the task at hand is to agree on what is needed to establish the panel. The rest can be left to the panel.

This sense of pragmatism occasionally broke down in practice. Details that were important “here and now” for some were viewed as the future panel’s work by others. The rules of procedure briefly fell into this category. The panel will adopt its draft rules of procedure. The question was whether this OEWG needed to completely finalize this draft. Perhaps, one observer pondered, brackets around voting could be there permanently. Debates retraced similar steps on whether UNEP should host the secretariat alone, or if the WHO or other organizations could be involved in some capacity. New brackets in previously clean text on operating principles contributed to a general frustration at the pace of work.

“Baby steps,” was how one participant characterized the first day. “We’ve agreed to drop ‘governing body’ in favor of ‘plenary,’ they sighed, hoping for a renewed sense of urgency in the days ahead.

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