

Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG-3.2 Highlights: Monday, 16 June 2025

After a plenary to hear reports from the contact groups, OEWG participants then divided themselves back into these groups for the remainder of the day and into the night.

Plenary

OEWG Chair Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) provided an update on participation, stating that 103 governments and 37 stakeholders had registered for the resumed session. She invited the contact group Co-Facilitators to report on progress.

For contact group 1 (membership and functions of bodies, decision making, and related rules of procedure), Co-Facilitator Miguel Ruiz Botero (Colombia) said some issues were resolved, including on referring to the governing body of the panel as “Plenary,” but more time will be needed to resolve issues relating to decision making and participation of observers, among others.

For contact group 2 (other foundational elements, related rules of procedure, and decision to establish the panel), Co-Facilitator Keima Gardiner (Trinidad and Tobago) reported that the group discussed text on the preamble, secretariat, financial arrangements, and operating principles and approaches. She said that the group agreed to delete preambular text in the foundational document and that, after agreement to establish a trust fund, an informal group is expected to provide clean text on the related paragraphs.

For contact group 3 (other draft rules of procedure, and draft decisions to forward rules, procedures and policies), Co-Facilitator Sam Adu-Kumi (Ghana) reported that the group discussed the draft decision containing recommendations for consideration by plenary at its first session and that delegates agreed that not all annexes will be ready for adoption, with delegates agreeing to reflect this in the text by distinguishing between the draft rules of procedure and the remaining three annexes, which will be considered later.

Co-Facilitator Itsuki Kuroda (Japan) reported that the group engaged in a first full reading of the draft proposal on interim arrangements to be considered by the intergovernmental meeting. She highlighted that participants agreed to request the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to provide the interim secretariat and noted that brackets were inserted around two preambular paragraphs because they relate to documents that are still under discussion.

BRAZIL requested that contact groups accommodate their request to add brackets around paragraph 2 of rule 35 on the rules of procedure for voting on matters of substance, supported by COLOMBIA, and on sectoral approaches under operating principles. SAUDI ARABIA requested that the mandate of all three contact groups be extended to “reasonably bracket” text in the effort to finalize the document. EGYPT observed a tendency to transfer the controversial issues to the rules of procedure rather than addressing them in the foundational document.

Nigeria, for the AFRICAN GROUP, urged against reopening text that has already been negotiated, as it undermines trust and progress that was collectively built.

Chair Alkemade recalled that the Co-Facilitators were tasked to focus on issues where there are divergent views. She urged delegates to avoid raising issues on which compromises had already been reached and assured them that they would have an opportunity to address the entire text.

In response to a question by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION on the annexes that are not being discussed at this session, Chair Alkemade said that, as previously agreed and reflected in the draft decision text, they will be transmitted for finalization by the panel.

Chair Alkemade urged delegates to show “true multilateralism,” noting that “we may be a little bit behind schedule.”

Contact Group 1

Co-facilitated by Toks Akinseye (UK) and Ruiz Botero, the group met throughout the day.

Membership of the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC): A lengthy debate ensued regarding the inclusion of policy expertise as a desirable form of expertise and knowledge for IEC members. There was broad support for the suggestion that, since the panel includes both “science” and “policy,” both are equally important with respect to expertise and knowledge in the IEC. Several others, however, stated that IEC members should focus on the scientific and technical aspects of the panel’s work elements, rather than policy, which should be covered by the plenary. Delegates agreed to include “socioeconomic” expertise as desirable for members in the IEC.

After further debate, the paragraph was parked and three formulations of revised text for the paragraph were drafted as proposed by two delegates and the Co-Facilitator respectively, each with different clarifications of how members are selected with or without explicit mentioning of “policy expertise,” to be discussed in an informal group who would later report back to the contact group.

After lunch, the informal group reported that no agreement was reached on whether to include policy expertise. One participant added that a lack of a common understanding of the institutional arrangements, including on the roles of the bureau and IEC, impeded progress. After the group rejected a proposal by Co-Facilitator Ruiz Botero to state that “IEC members are selected for their expertise,” the text was again parked for later consideration.

A lengthy debate ensued over whether to allow non-governmental participants in meetings of the IEC. One delegate highlighted the importance of non-governmental institutions supporting the voice of countries that lack institutional capacity. Several countries suggested adding a mechanism to notify panel members about non-governmental participants, allowing them to object to their participation. One delegate questioned the feasibility of such a mechanism for intersessional IEC meetings.

After further discussion, delegates agreed to specify that representatives of non-governmental organizations may participate as observers to the IEC, “without the right to vote or to join or to

block consensus in IEC meetings” and with a bracketed inclusion that this will be “subject to the prior notification to and non-objection from the members of the panel.”

On whether bureau members, representatives of other relevant science-policy panels, international organizations, and relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) may be invited to participate as observers in IEC meetings, delegates agreed that the invitation would be made by the IEC chair. One delegate insisted that the additions from the previous paragraph on observers to the IEC be transposed to bureau members, representatives from other science-policy panels, and relevant MEAs. This bracketed text was added and the paragraph was parked.

Several delegates urged engaging in a first reading of the IEC’s functions, noting that related paragraphs have not yet been discussed.

Co-Facilitator Akinseye announced that a Friends of the Co-Facilitator Group will convene to resolve the parked issue of decision-making. Discussions continued into the night.

Contact Group 2

The contact group, co-facilitated by Gardiner and Kateřina Šebková (Czechia), met in the morning and evening.

Operating principles and approaches: General frustrations were expressed after three delegations sought to add text or brackets to a previously clean operating principle on the range of disciplines, sources, and forms of knowledge that the panel would consider. These delegations both sought to bracket a reference to “sectoral expertise,” with one worried that it would allow established sectors in the Global North to dominate the panel. Others observed specialized knowledge in various sectors relevant to the panel’s work, citing examples such as agriculture, transport, and industry. The group agreed to include “appropriate sectoral, scientific, technical, and socioeconomic expertise.” One delegation objected to the term “relevant forms of knowledge,” saying the panel should only consider science, while others cited the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), including its Task Force on Indigenous and Local Knowledge. They agreed to its inclusion, adding “and taking into account as appropriate.”

There was also agreement on including informal workers in the principle on recognizing the technical knowledge and experience of workers.

On the principle of scientific independence, credibility, and legitimacy, one delegation asked to remove the reference to scientific independence and add, from UNEA Resolution 6/6 (cooperation among MEAs), “reaffirming the autonomous and independent nature of MEAs and emphasizing the need to respect their individual mandates.” This was not accepted, but a compromise was eventually found by retaining the reference to scientific independence in the first paragraph and specifying the independence of MEAs and autonomy in the principle on avoiding duplication with relevant MEAs.

Two principles referenced gender. One Member State, supported by two others, suggested changing references on gender to “men and women.” Many opposed, stressing that these principles were negotiated and agreed at OEWG 3.1, and the terms are commonly used in other panels and UN bodies. The two principles were parked.

On the principle of producing policy-relevant while not policy-prescriptive, scientifically robust, unbiased, and accessible deliverables, compromise was reached by reverting to the UNEA Resolution 5/8 language, which removes references to prevention as well as to the negative socioeconomic aspects of policies, with the understanding that pollution prevention is a key objective of the panel.

The group agreed to the principle of flexibility to respond to members’ needs, in particular to those of developing countries.

On the principle of protecting human health and the environment, the phrase “with special attention to those that are vulnerable” prompted discussion. One delegate suggested

specifying that it is those who are vulnerable “to pollution.” The group agreed to move it to the preamble of the draft decision adopting the foundational document with “to pollution” in brackets.

Revisiting the principle of integrating capacity building into all relevant areas of its work, one delegate remained firm that scientific and technical capacity building should be included, citing MEAs. This was too narrow for other delegates who preferred a broad reference and noted that this panel would not be an MEA.

Financial arrangements: There was no agreement on whether to specify in the foundational document that contributions to the trust fund should not come with conditionalities, orient the panel’s work, or be earmarked for specific activities. Many drew attention to IPBES’ varied experiences with contributions to its trust fund, but also noted the need to facilitate contributions to the trust fund. After trying various options, the issue was parked, and a group was tasked with developing a compromise text for consideration during the night discussions.

The group agreed to delete several paragraphs related to the bureau’s role in reviewing budgetary information and the secretariat’s role, noting that these roles were already captured elsewhere in the foundational document.

Contact Group 3

Co-facilitated by Adu-Kumi and Kuroda, the group met in the afternoon and evening.

Delegates worked on the draft decision on recommendations for consideration by the panel at its first session ([SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/7](#)), including whether to “take note” or “welcome” the work of the OEWG, what this work consists of, and refer to the annexes. The group eventually settled for “take note,” simplified references, and agreed to the text.

The group also cleared paragraphs on financial contributions in the draft decision on interim arrangements and agreed on the modalities for the UNEP Executive Director to convene the first session of the governing body of the panel. Discussions continued on textual proposals for an interim bureau and modalities for submitting offers to host the secretariat.

In the Corridors

Perhaps the South American winter weighed on participants’ minds after what one called a “glacial” first day of progress. To try to speed up on the second day, one Co-Facilitator advised, “If we can’t decide on the little bells on the Christmas tree, then we’ll have a bare tree.” This echoed calls in other contact groups that “less is more.” A simple, agreed-upon text is better than an elaborate, disputed text.

But some member states clung to the bells. For a group of developing countries, it was “essential” to avoid conditionalities on trust fund contributions, and it must be part of the foundational document. Various options were explored, even including the concern in the meeting report, to no avail. Similarly, bells were ringing when discussing membership of the IEC. One observer left the group exasperated, “We spent three hours on policy expertise, and it’s only one paragraph.” When they turned to the IEC’s functions, applause broke out because the text looked clear. Slowly, placards were raised for delegates to remind everyone that this text had never been discussed in any OEWG session.

Elsewhere, brackets started to slowly clear, often because duplicative or detailed paragraphs were deleted wholesale. Many found the various informal groups “constructive” even if they had not yet led to agreement. There was a sense of quiet optimism flickering amid worries of where, or if, this panel will “land” with less than 48 hours to go.