

Science-Policy Panel for Chemicals, Waste, and Pollution OEWG-3.2 Highlights: Thursday, 19 June 2025

After having worked throughout the night and into the early hours of the day, participants resumed discussions in an informal group in the morning before returning to plenary to finalize proposals for the establishment of the panel. These proposals will be forwarded for adoption to the Intergovernmental Meeting, and with this, the *Ad hoc* open-ended working group (OEWG) completed its work.

Plenary

OEWG Chair Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) opened the resumed plenary, which had been postponed to allow informal consultations further time to address outstanding issues.

Informal group Co-Facilitator Miguel Ruiz Botero (Colombia) reported on the outcome of discussions. He highlighted agreement on a decision-making package, which included elements of membership and related rules of procedure, as well as on reformulated text on participation of observers. He added that one delegation had further introduced a package related to gender and explained that this was incorporated and accepted by the group with the view to finalize the foundational document.

Noting it reflects the outcome from the informal discussions, Chair Alkemade introduced the draft decision to establish the panel ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.5](#)) and the plenary then went through the decision text and the foundational document on a “no objection basis.”

On a paragraph of the operating principles on taking an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that incorporates a broad range of relevant disciplines and sources, INDONESIA, opposed by COLOMBIA, CANADA, and the US, called for amending the text so it reads Indigenous “and local peoples” knowledge. Chair Alkemade suggested to have Indonesia’s views reflected in the report of the meeting, noting that the paragraph in question had been thoroughly discussed. The US said that while she agrees on the substance of the proposal, procedurally “we would be in trouble” if brackets are introduced to text that had been cleared by the informal group. Chair Alkemade invited Indonesia to informally consult on the matter. After further

consultations, URUGUAY, reporting on attempts to find a compromise, said that common ground had been found by adding “and local knowledge” after Indigenous knowledge. URUGUAY added that this was maximizing flexibility from all delegations and based on the understanding that no other paragraph would be opened. The plenary agreed to this change.

On the preambular text of the draft decision to establish the panel, Chair Alkemade’s proposals for clearing the text from brackets were objected, except for one paragraph expressing appreciation for the work of the OEWG to prepare proposals on the science-policy panel.

On the operational part of the draft decision to establish the panel, delegates agreed to lift brackets around the first paragraph, which contains the decision text to establish the panel.

Delegates agreed to transmit the draft decision to establish the panel, including its annex containing the foundational document, for consideration by the Intergovernmental Meeting.

Turning to the draft decision on recommendations for consideration by the plenary at its first session, including its annexes ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.6](#)), Chair Alkemade noted remaining brackets on terminology relating to Indigenous Peoples and local communities in several parts of the document.

Delegates agreed to transmit the draft decision for consideration by the Intergovernmental Meeting. They also agreed to transmit the draft decision on arrangements for the interim period ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/CRP.7](#)).

ARGENTINA read a statement emphasizing their commitment to gender parity and to individual merit, clarifying their understanding that gender refers to “the two sexes: masculine and feminine.” MEXICO highlighted that gender is “a principle, a conviction, and not a passing trend,” which is essential for human rights and key to various multilateral environmental agreements. Noting that some are attempting to introduce their national interpretation of the term, he cautioned against “erasing decades of progress.”

PAKISTAN thanked the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Executive Director for her guidance and welcomed the “exciting moment” of establishing the panel. The US stated that “multilateralism can deliver collective solutions” and contribute to bringing integrity, care, and commitment.

Women, for all MAJOR GROUPS, except business, underscored the relevance of gender to understand inequalities and enable participation in decision-making processes, and called for recognizing the realities of all groups in the panel.

After thanking Co-Facilitators of the contact groups, all Bureau members and delegations for their constructive engagement, Chair Alkemade concluded consideration of Agenda Items four (preparation of proposals for the establishment of the panel) and five (recommendations to the Executive Director of UNEP for the preparation of the Intergovernmental Meeting to establish the panel). She opened Agenda Item six (other matters), noting no other matters.

Adoption of the report of the meeting

Rapporteur Linda Kosgei (Kenya) introduced the draft reports of OEWG 3.1 ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3/5](#)) and the resumed session OEWG 3.2 ([UNEP/SPP-CWP/OEWG.3\(II\)/L.1](#) and [Add.1](#)). The plenary adopted the reports.

Closing of the meeting

FIJI highlighted the threat of transboundary marine pollution for marine ecosystems, pointing to the frontline position of Small Island Development States (SIDS). She noted Indigenous Peoples are “not only stakeholders, but rightsholders,” and called for a science-policy panel based on a human-rights approach, a firm commitment to gender balance, and independent science free from vested interests.

Nigeria, for the AFRICAN REGION, voiced support for the participation of observers and called for an inclusive and balanced panel. They welcomed the inclusion of capacity building in the panel’s functions, urged for avoiding earmarking of contributions to the trust fund, and said pollution in all forms, including through legacy chemicals and waste, should be included in the panel’s scope.

KENYA underscored that the panel opens a “new chapter of optimism” and provides clarity for the sound management of chemicals, waste and pollution prevention, especially for those disproportionately exposed to toxic chemicals. Referring to the UN80 Initiative designed to streamline operations and address financial challenges, he emphasized his country’s preference for the panel secretariat to be based at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

Noting both opportunities and challenges over the week, URUGUAY thanked all delegations for their strong commitment and optimism.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES thanked Member States that defended the rights of Indigenous Peoples as enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and called for the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples Advisory Committee within the structure of the science-policy panel as central to forwarding Indigenous knowledge and science, not just in name, but to shape the decision making and implementation of the panel’s work.

MAJOR GROUPS, except Business and Industry, stressed they were “puzzled why it proved difficult to refer to the agreed right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment.” They lamented that the outcome of the final negotiations did not signal the immediate need for civil society observers to the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee and noted that “by having an objective that still contains two brackets, we are doing reputational damage to the future panel.” She stressed that despite the restrictions on their role, they will continue to engage and remain energetic and optimistic.

UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen thanked and commended all on the momentous agreement at a time “when the world decided to make the best available science on chemicals, waste and pollution accessible to the world.” She stressed the panel’s critical role in the uptake of sound policies in this realm, adding that “multilateralism will deliver when there is good will.”

The EU congratulated participants on their collaborative spirit and the achievement of the goal to strengthen the science-policy interface.

Chair Alkemade closed the meeting at 7:10 pm.

In the Corridors

In the early morning hours, a thick fog began to envelop the conference center in Punta del Este. The fog was so thick it could be cut with a knife. Yet, at brief moments, the fog cleared and it was possible to scan into the horizon, if only faintly. The fog was thick enough to prevent high-level delegates arriving to Uruguay for the Intergovernmental Meeting to formally establish the panel. Perhaps it was a sign that the Meeting would not in fact take place until Friday.

The fog also characterized the atmosphere inside the conference center, with participants remaining at crosshairs over fundamental sticking points on decision-making principles and the rules of procedure for the panel. After a full night of informal discussions, participants were able to clear text on operating principles for decision-making, namely in agreeing to “upholding” consensus in decision-making. Yet, the US’s request to replace the word gender with “equality between men and women,” and Indonesia’s request to treat Indigenous Peoples and local communities as equivalent, became 11th hour roadblocks to clearing text and was felt by some to be an act of “ransom,” which prevented finalizing the work of the OEWG unless their specific positions were accepted.

Eventually, perhaps miraculously, the fog lifted and the day ended in applause and commendations on the spirit of multilateralism that prevailed. The OEWG managed to complete work on the foundational document, which is the basis for establishing the panel by the Intergovernmental Meeting, now scheduled for Friday.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of OEWG 3.2 will be available on Monday, 23 June 2025 at enb.iisd.org/oewg3-2-science-policy-panel-contribute-sound-management-chemicals-waste-prevent-pollution