

## ISP-CWP Highlights: Monday, 2 February 2026

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) held its first-ever meeting. It started slowly, with a long procedural debate. Member states then turned to the meeting's focus: finalizing the Panel's draft rules of procedure (RoP) that will make the Panel operational.

### Opening of the Meeting

After an alphorn performance, Inger Andersen, UNEP Executive Director, opened the first session of the ISP-CWP. She called the Panel's establishment a historic step to close a "glaring science-policy gap" on chemicals, waste, and pollution. She noted 127 members to the ISP-CWP as of 30 January 2026 and great interest by others in joining. Recalling that participants had chosen multilateralism, science and cooperation, she underscored that "togetherness will be vital" in going forward.

Katrin Schneeberger, Director of the Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland, emphasized strengthened collaboration, including through strong engagement with university and scientific networks and relevant international organizations. She highlighted the need for a well-connected and resourced Secretariat, noting that Geneva offers the right conditions to host it, and assured the Plenary of Switzerland's commitment to contributing to the Panel, including through capacity-building.

### Organizational Matters

**Adoption of the Scenario Note:** A lengthy debate ensued on the scenario note ([UNEP/ISP-CWP.1/INF/1](#)), which sets out the modalities and organization of work for the meeting, including that the United Nations Environment Assembly's (UNEA) RoP will be applied to the work of the Plenary's first session, pending the formal consideration and adoption of the Panels's RoP.

Much of the debate centered on whether to provisionally adopt the Panel's RoP immediately rather than using the UNEA RoP. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, supported by SAUDI ARABIA, KENYA, INDIA, BELARUS, BRAZIL, IRAN, BAHRAIN, STATE OF PALESTINE, and QATAR, opposed the proposal to use UNEA's RoP, suggesting the Panel's draft RoP should guide its work from the outset, and urging to focus on their finalization with the interim secretariat leading the conduct of business until then. BRAZIL highlighted the Panel's independence and cautioned against applying UNEA's RoP.

SWITZERLAND, the UK, COSTA RICA, ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, NORWAY, the EU, URUGUAY, CANADA, MEXICO, PANAMA, NIGERIA, COLOMBIA, and

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC voiced support for the suggestion in the scenario note to make use of UNEA's RoP to proceed with the election of the Bureau, noting the many bracketed sections in the Panel's draft RoP. They stressed that finalizing the Panel's RoP at this meeting is a high priority and urged the election of the Bureau and Chair to advance this work.

EGYPT, supported by INDONESIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, proposed adopting the draft RoP on a provisional basis. EGYPT said this would address the concerns of those calling for electing officers early in the meeting and set the base for finalizing the Panel's RoP.

Andersen proposed electing the Plenary's Chair based on decision-making rules 35 and 36 (on decision making on matters of substance and of procedure) of the draft RoP, which are not bracketed and would allow for consensus decisions on matters of substance, and a vote on matters of procedure. She said that it would be more appropriate for an elected Chair to guide the discussion of whether the entire draft RoP could be provisionally adopted.

EGYPT queried why the Panel's draft RoP would not be provisionally adopted in its entirety. COLOMBIA noted that all relevant rules for the election of officers are bracketed, except for rules 35 and 36. They therefore questioned the added value of adopting the entire set of rules, since the focus is on electing the Chair and Bureau. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION urged agreement on a complete set of rules ahead of elections, voicing concern that a Chair without RoP "could become a dictator."

Andersen then suggested adopting the Panel's draft RoP provisionally with the understanding that elections would then take place and the Plenary would decide on the way forward, guided by the elected Chair. COLOMBIA and SWITZERLAND objected to the provisional application of the entire draft RoP. SAUDI ARABIA and EGYPT voiced support for Andersen's proposal.

Calling for legal clarity, CHINA, supported by COLOMBIA, GHANA, PAKISTAN, and SRI LANKA, proposed adopting the Panel's draft rules 35, 36, and 49 (modifications to the RoP), in conjunction with UNEA's RoP *ad interim* with the condition that UNEA's RoP would apply only at this session and the Panel's rules would be given priority in case of incompatibility.

The EU and SWITZERLAND expressed a preference for electing the Chair in accordance with the Panel's draft rules 35 and 36, and asking the Chair to immediately form a contact group on the draft RoP.

After further consultations, Andersen proposed, and member states agreed, to use UNEA rule 18.1 (on elections) solely for the purpose of electing the Chair, on the understanding that the elected Chair would immediately set up a contact group to take up

the Panel's draft RoP, and hold a plenary meeting on Wednesday morning to continue the conduct of the session.

**Election of Officers:** Andersen noted that only one nomination for the Chair had been put forward, namely that of Osvaldo Alvarez Pérez, Chile. The Panel elected Alvarez Pérez as ISP-CWP Chair by acclamation.

ISP-CWP Chair Alvarez Pérez announced the establishment of a contact group on the draft RoP, which would report to plenary on Wednesday. He expressed hope that this would allow the Panel to finalize its RoP and thereby become operational.

### **Contact Group**

**Rules of Procedure:** ISP-CWP Chair Alvarez Pérez chaired the contact group. The Secretariat provided background for the draft RoP ([UNEP/ISP-CWP.1/3](#)), highlighting that the document had been transmitted from the Intergovernmental Meeting, where rules 35, 36, and 49 had been agreed upon. They also provided an overview of the overall structure of the draft RoP and presented opportunities to align it with the foundational document, as outlined in a nonpaper.

Delegates agreed to the proposal by Chair Alvarez Pérez to task the Secretariat with transmitting relevant text from the foundational document to the draft RoP for alignment. Member states then began a first reading of the document, paragraph by paragraph, focusing on the rules that did not require revision to align with the foundational document.

**Definitions:** Delegates requested changes to the order of definitions and voiced divergent views on whether to refer to the Chair and Vice-Chairs for defining the Bureau.

**Venue and dates:** There was agreement that only the Plenary, and not the Bureau, should decide on the venue and dates of the sessions (rule 3).

On the annual occurrence of the Plenary sessions (rule 4.1), one country proposed that sessions be held every two or three years, given the need for intersessional work and the Panel's broad scope. Many member and observer states opposed, emphasizing the need for annual sessions in line with other relevant science-policy panels and especially at this early stage, to avoid losing momentum.

Different views were also expressed on the need for extraordinary sessions (rule 4.2), with two member states saying they were unnecessary and several other states noting the value of the flexibility provided by this option.

**Agenda:** On the preparation, distribution, and process for suggesting additional items to the provisional agenda (rules 9.1, 9.2, 9.3), some asked for clarity on how members can propose new items. A few member states stressed the need to provide the provisional agenda in all of the UN languages.

On the adoption of the agenda (rules 10.1, 10.2 and 10.2*bis*), a few member states opposed a rule that would automatically include any items of the session for which consideration was not concluded on the next session's agenda. Some countries supported this rule's inclusion, with one suggesting that it is better placed in the section on the preparation of the provisional agenda.

Views diverged on how to prepare the agendas for extraordinary sessions (rule 11) because two member states disagreed with the need for such sessions, while others suggested aligning the processes for these agendas with those for ordinary sessions.

**Representation, credentials, and accreditation:** There were debates on the timing of when credentials should be provided, noting that there may be understandable delays given some countries' circumstances (rule 12.2). There was a suggestion to

specify that electronic versions of credentials are acceptable.

Views diverged on whether to specify which government authorities could sign the credentials or to leave room for member states to decide which authority would be appropriate (rule 12.4).

One member state underlined that a member state cannot be prevented from participating solely because its credentials had not yet been submitted (rule 12.5).

Some suggested deleting rule 12.5*bis*, which disallows participation by proxy, but one member state noted that this issue might be linked to discussions on the location of the Secretariat and meetings, given that not all countries have embassies in both Geneva and Nairobi.

**Role of the Chair:** There was general acceptance of the Chair's duties and proposals as listed in rule 15.1 and 15.2, with the exception of the Chair's role in applying the decision-making procedure in the foundational document and RoP, on which member states wanted to bracket and return to after discussion on the rest of the RoP.

**Election of the Bureau members:** Views strongly diverged on whether to elect the members by a vote or consensus. A few also requested geographic, in addition to regional, balance on the Bureau

### **In the Corridors**

The first meeting of a new international body is often cause for celebration, but the mood before the ISP-CWP's historic opening was tempered by knowledge of a looming procedural debate. As foreshadowed in the pre-briefing, some member states objected to using UNEA's RoP to guide the Panel's work until its own RoP could be finalized and adopted. The question of whether to play by the UNEA rules or the draft, unfinished, Panel's rules occupied nearly three hours of the Panel's first meeting.

Many observers and some member states were left wondering why the debate mattered. After all, only one person was nominated for the position of Chair. But, as several noted, the Bureau is a different matter. For some Bureau seats, notably for the region of Eastern European States, there are more nominations than available positions. Under the UNEA rules, the Bureau vote could take place immediately. But the draft RoP for the Panel still has brackets around much of the processes related to the Bureau's election. Provisionally adopting all the Panel's draft RoP might mean that, if the brackets around the Bureau's elections persist, it might not be elected here in Geneva. The central body guiding the Panel's early efforts would therefore be missing.

For some, it was a matter of principle: an international body should be governed by its own rules. There was much dismay at the delay, but also important questions were raised about the implications of the decision on which set of rules to use. A few worried that provisionally adopting the draft rules might reduce the incentive to finish them at this meeting.

As some delegates and Executive Director Anderson moved between the various factions huddled on the plenary floor, it was clear that a smooth start was out of reach. Ultimately, member states elected the first-ever Chair of the Panel, Osvaldo Alvarez Pérez (Chile), using the UNEA rules. He immediately set member states to work in a contact group on the bespoke rules that will set the foundation for the Panel's work at this meeting and in the future. While disagreements persisted, they illuminated the differing substantive visions for how the Panel will operate and, having reached a compromise on a very specific and limited application of UNEA's rules, discussions took place in a much-improved, although not quite celebratory, mood.