

## ISP-CWP Highlights: Tuesday, 3 February 2026

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) met in a contact group all day to try to significantly advance the draft rules of procedure (RoP). That goal proved elusive as Member States worked through the second reading of the document.

### Contact Group

**Rules of Procedure:** The contact group was chaired by ISP-CWP Chair Osvaldo Álvarez Pérez (Chile) and discussed the draft RoP ([UNEP/ISP-CWP.1/3](#)) throughout the day. The contact group completed its first reading of the document, covering from decision-making to whether the foundational document will take precedence in the event of a conflict with the RoP.

At the beginning of the second reading of the RoP, the interim secretariat introduced an in-session document that reflects the changes made to align the RoP with the foundational document. Most changes were to reflect agreements on the composition of the Bureau and Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC) and the definitions of Member States and observers. Some delegations called for adding text on several points under Conduct of Business (section 10), including on: introducing proposals and amendments; and on motions and points of order.

In the afternoon, Chair Álvarez Pérez suggested, and delegates agreed to, continue work on the basis of the document prepared by the interim secretariat. The Chair's proposal to consider rules 21-30 that are specific to the IEC last was accepted with the understanding that finalization of the entire RoP is the priority for this week.

**Decision-Making:** On voting, a Member State, supported by others, called for including a rule to decide the location of the Panel's Secretariat, proposing a majority vote by means of secret ballot. One delegate suggested a simple majority vote. Several highlighted the importance of deciding on the Secretariat's location at this meeting to make the Panel fully operational.

Some Member States rejected the proposal, with one arguing that a decision on the Secretariat location is a matter of substance, for which consensus is the agreed-upon procedure. Others urged focus on finalizing the RoP and suggested addressing the

Secretariat location under the relevant agenda item. One Member State highlighted that there is currently an operational interim secretariat.

Several delegates proposed deleting draft rules on voting (rules 38.1 and 38.2), noting that they are contradictory to the already agreed-upon rules on decision-making on substance and procedure (rules 35 and 36). One delegate highlighted that those rules would contradict the operating principle of upholding consensus.

On voting by a show of hands, two delegations expressed a preference for a secret ballot, noting that open voting procedures might limit some delegations' ability to freely express their preferences.

**Languages:** Some delegations supported having Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian, and Spanish as the official languages of Plenary sessions only, given budgetary constraints, while two Member States preferred to keep the option to work in all UN languages for sessions of the Bureau and subsidiary bodies as well.

**On the precedence of the foundational document over the rules of procedure:** There was some discussion on the need for a rule clarifying that, in the event of a conflict between the RoP and the foundational document, the latter shall prevail, with several States preferring to retain this rule. One delegation asked whether bracketed text in the foundational document would take precedence over non-bracketed text in the RoP.

**Title:** A lengthy debate ensued during the second reading on whether the set of rules should be for the ISP-CWP, its sessions, or sessions of its Plenary. Some noted that the RoP include rules for the IEC, making references to "the Plenary" sessions illogical. Others highlighted precedents from other processes, including the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), which make reference to "sessions of the Plenary." Chair Álvarez Pérez pointed at a provision for subsidiary bodies that "the rules of procedure will apply *mutatis mutandis* to the proceedings of the subsidiary bodies." The title was kept in brackets.

**Scope:** Several Member States proposed reflecting that the scope of the RoP extends beyond "all sessions of the Plenary" by stating "all meetings under the Panel" or adding "its subsidiary bodies, including the IEC." Others preferred retaining the

draft text and pointed to the *mutatis mutandis* provision for subsidiary bodies. Some Member States highlighted problems with expanding the scope beyond Plenary sessions, noting this would lock in potentially impracticable rules for the conduct of subsidiary body meetings.

A proposal by one Member State to insert a reference to the foundational document was debated at length. Several delegates expressed flexibility to accept the suggestion, provided the reference to compliance with the RoP is retained. Many delegates supported a bridging proposal to delete the reference to both aspects. The paragraph was kept in brackets pending agreement on a draft rule highlighting the prevalence of the foundational document.

**Definitions:** There was protracted discussion on the definition of observers, particularly regarding reference to Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Some attempts were made to remove brackets around a comma and an “and” between Indigenous Peoples and local communities, which had been transferred from the foundational document, with some pointing to different wording used in relevant conventions and processes.

Many delegations preferred to go with the language exactly as in the foundational document, in line with what was negotiated in Punta del Este, and therefore suggested adding also a reference to “groups in vulnerable situations.” Noting that the list does not include scientific and academic organizations, one Member State proposed deleting the examples.

Eventually, the Chair proposed an alternative simplified definition of observers that would refer to paragraphs 5, 6, and 7 of the foundational document and to the RoP. Two Member States requested time to consult with their capitals on giving up on the specific reference to Indigenous Peoples “as well as” local communities, but there was general agreement that this could represent a compromise.

In other definitions, a Member State proposed organizing the terms by importance rather than the proposed alphabetical order. Another one suggested adding definitions for “matters of substance” and “matters of procedure,” but this was contested.

**Venue, dates, and notification of sessions:** There was general agreement that the Plenary sessions should be held at the seat of the Secretariat, unless the Secretariat makes other appropriate arrangements in consultation with the Members and it is so decided by the Plenary. One Member State asked for more time to consult on this proposal.

Regarding the frequency of meetings, two Member States insisted that the Plenary meet every other year, with one noting that most multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) on chemicals and waste meet biennially. The other State raised the issue of support for developing country delegates to participate in annual meetings.

Many Member States opposed, preferring to meet every year, particularly in the early years of the Panel. Some noted that the

Montreal Protocol meets every year, and that the other relevant MEAs also met annually in their early years. Some suggested that there could be an option to change the frequency in the future, if a provision is added allowing the Plenary to decide otherwise.

While many welcomed the option to hold extraordinary sessions if necessary, and if a majority of Members agreed, one Member State opposed them. Another Member State said that extraordinary sessions are necessary only if the Plenary meets every other year.

On the timing for the Secretariat to notify members and observers of the dates and venue of sessions, one delegation supported the option for 12 weeks given visa timelines. Another delegation pointed out that the 12-week option would give the Secretariat very little time to secure a location and sign the necessary contracts in order to announce the correct venue and dates to the Member States.

### ***In the Corridors***

The negotiations on the RoP ground to a near-standstill when Member States entered the second reading. Some of the lengthy discussions reflected deeper uncertainties of the scope of the RoP and how they will apply. Chair Álvarez Pérez underlined the value of these discussions in advancing progress on the RoP. Other discussions reignited political disagreements, notably over the language used for Indigenous Peoples and local communities. Here, for three hours, many expressed their strong views but also acknowledged that the contact group will not be able to resolve this debate, which continues across global environmental negotiation processes.

Despite the discussion on the definition of observers, many stayed outside the contact group. One technical expert felt the RoP seemed “distant” from their expertise and interest in the panel’s future work, asking, “What is *mutatis mutandis*, anyway?” Instead, there were discussions about how to engage the scientific and knowledge communities that could be involved in this panel. The scope is potentially vast: from ecotoxicologists to waste management experts, Indigenous Peoples to catalytic chemists, and much more. There are some existing networks for some areas of expertise, but no mechanism yet to bridge across them. As one scientist noted, no one is yet talking about innovation sciences to help green chemistry and products from the outset.

One observer spoke about their efforts to raise awareness of this panel, particularly among NGO and scientific communities. They even helped prepare the journalists at this meeting, who are trying to make sense of the discussions and their pace.

Change was evident in the room, even if it was more subtle. The nameplates for the US and Luxembourg changed from yellow to white because both countries are now Member States. Rejoining the science-policy family made some wonder what “makes chemicals special” for the US, given its recent withdrawal from the ISP-CWP’s sister organizations, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and IPBES.