

## ISP-CWP Highlights: Wednesday, 4 February 2026

The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) began the day with many Members of the Panel lamenting the pace of work thus far. Panel Members agreed to elect, by acclamation, a partial Bureau in accordance with the UN Environment Assembly's election rules. Delegates then continued deliberations in the contact group and established an informal group to advance the draft rules of procedure (RoP).

### Plenary

Noting the slow pace of progress on the draft RoP in the contact group, ISP-CWP Chair Osvaldo Álvarez Pérez (Chile) proposed to continue contact group discussions in the hope of adopting the RoP at a plenary meeting on Thursday. He called for a focus on removing brackets, avoiding general remarks, and finding compromise language, stressing cooperation and flexibility.

COLOMBIA, supported by ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA, suggested having the plenary scheduled at 10am on Thursday and, if the "glacial pace" of progress were to continue, to substantially change the work mode to allow for other key decisions at this meeting, namely on: the physical location of the secretariat; the Bureau; and the content of intersessional work. Panama, for the GROUP OF LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN STATES (GRULAC), agreed on the need to move in a timely and functional manner but called for being mindful of small delegations and their limitations.

Chair Álvarez Pérez outlined his priorities for this meeting, namely: the election of a Bureau; a decision on the secretariat's location; a functioning Trust Fund; and a decision on the dates of the next Plenary.

ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA urged clarity in the process, saying the interim adoption of UNEA's RoP would give the election of Bureau members a clear procedural basis, but lamenting that "at every single juncture we introduce an element that wastes time."

Lesotho, for the AFRICAN GROUP, voiced concern over the lack of progress toward finalizing the RoP and called for: their finalization and adoption; Bureau elections by acclamation; operationalization of the Trust Fund; and identification of intersessional tasks. NIGERIA highlighted the importance of deciding on the Secretariat's location.

The EU, SWITZERLAND, and COLOMBIA supported the way forward and priorities laid out by the Chair, saying the priority is to ensure the ISP-CWP is operational. The EU called for changing the modalities of the contact group's work, highlighted the urgency of finalizing rules pertinent to elections, and said all regions should be duly represented in the Bureau.

Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the ASIA-PACIFIC GROUP, with CHINA, TUNISIA, PAKISTAN, the US, BAHRAIN,

AZERBAIJAN, and QATAR, called for focusing on the election of Bureau members from those regions with uncontested nominations. CHINA observed that the foundational document already outlines the Bureau's functions and, with the US, suggested that electing members by acclamation would then allow the Bureau to begin work.

The RUSSIAN FEDERATION queried how long the term of Bureau members would be. They highlighted a lack of consensus on Bureau nominations in the Eastern European Region, signaled agreement to elect Bureau members for those regions with uncontested nominations, and proposed electing Bureau members for the Eastern European Region after adoption of the RoP. Objecting to the lack of observance of a point of order made earlier, which the Chair justified by noting there are no agreed RoP that would allow for points of order, they urged the Chair to observe common rules for the conduct of UN meetings.

CHINA, PAKISTAN, the US, and others supported a two-year term for the Bureau members, noting that this term is currently in the draft RoP.

Chair Álvarez Pérez proposed, and delegates agreed, to elect, under UNEA rule 18.1, by acclamation, Vice-Chairs of the Plenary for those groups with uncontested nominations for a two-year term, unless otherwise agreed in the RoP.

The Plenary elected Jean Marie Bope Bope Lapwong (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and Linda Kosgei (Kenya) for the African States; Chen Haijun (China) and Amal Albawardi (Saudi Arabia) for the Asia-Pacific States; José Isabel López Arroyo (Mexico) for GRULAC; and Bart Rymen (Belgium) and Helena Richards (the UK), who was also elected rapporteur, for the Western European and other States.

Delegates agreed that the term of office for Vice-Chairs also applies to the Chair.

On the Trust Fund, the US asked for clarification on the essential financial rules needed to operationalize the Fund, to help understand what that decision might look like. They also asked whether the Panel could expect a proposal from the Chair in that regard. The interim Secretariat responded that, in the absence of financial rules and procedures, UNEP rules apply for the receipt of funds and, therefore, a decision to establish the Fund without detailed rules could be sufficient.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES urged Panel Members to avoid conflating Indigenous Peoples with local communities or other groups. Urging meaningful inclusion of Indigenous Peoples in the Panel's work, they called for dedicated seats on the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee and the establishment of an Indigenous Peoples advisory committee.

### Contact and Informal Groups

Work in the afternoon proceeded in two groups. The contact group, chaired by Chair Álvarez Pérez, took up the admission and participation of observers, decision-making, and the precedence of the foundational document. The informal group, facilitated by

Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands) took up the role and operation of the Bureau and subsidiary bodies.

**Observers:** Lengthy discussions took place as delegates attempted to agree on procedures for admitting observers other than those already recognized by relevant organizations or processes, but no compromise was found. One delegation expressed concern that, with certain language formulations, applications by observers would first be judged by the secretariat as to whether the observers are “qualified in matters covered by the Panel.” Supported by others, they proposed that the secretariat first circulate, by electronic means, any application by observer candidates to all Panel Members, with observer status granted if no Panel Member objects in writing. The paragraph and alternative formulations remain bracketed.

One delegation proposed that observer status should not be permanent, but instead subject to review at each session. Several delegates rejected the proposal, citing adverse effects on non-governmental expert participation and the bureaucratic burden of such a process. The rule was kept in brackets.

On the participation of observers, delegates voiced divergent views on whether observers may participate in “any meeting” or “Plenary.” Some delegates proposed making observer participation subject to non-objection from the Members of the Panel. One delegation highlighted the distinction between observer admission and participation, noting that the latter is already accorded in the foundational document without a non-objection clause. Several delegations drew attention to the added value of observer participation. Lacking agreement, the rule was kept in brackets.

**Decision-Making:** Delegates agreed to the rule that “each member of the plenary has one vote” (rule 37), and to transferring an explanation of the phrase “members present and voting” (rule 38.2) to definitions.

A Panel Member, supported by several others, proposed a new rule for selecting the secretariat location by a simple majority vote through a secret ballot. Several other delegations objected, questioning the idea of a simple majority vote for this purpose when the Panel has already agreed to rules on decision-making, either requiring consensus (on substance) or a two-thirds majority (on procedure). One Panel Member stressed that the selection of the secretariat is a substantive matter to be decided by consensus.

Delegates discussed general voting modalities at length, with many delegations voicing a preference for secret ballots over a show of hands or roll-call votes. One Panel Member proposed that procedural matters be handled by a show of hands or by roll-call votes. Others urged that every vote should be taken by secret ballot, highlighting that there are no “easy issues.” Text proposals by the Chair and a Panel Member reflecting the preference for making secret ballots the default voting modality did not reach consensus. Discussions continued into the evening.

**Precedence of the Foundational Document:** Delegates agreed to a rule clarifying the precedence of the foundational document over the rules of procedure (rule 50).

**Bureau:** After agreeing that the Bureau should have two members from each of the five UN regions, the informal group debated the selection of Bureau members. Views diverged on whether to include the need to consider geographical, regional, intra-regional, and gender balance. In the spirit of compromise, several delegations agreed to refer instead to the operating principles and approaches set out in the foundational document, but some suggested that not all of them are applicable to the Bureau. A suggestion that the Panel could elect members in cases where a region cannot agree to its nominations was opposed by one Panel Member.

The group agreed to a two-year term for elected Bureau members, with the possibility of re-election for one consecutive term, and to rotate the Chair among the UN regions, without re-election.

While there was some agreement that regions could voluntarily nominate alternatives, two Panel Members objected. The text remains bracketed.

There was agreement that the Bureau could invite the Subsidiary Body Chairs to its meetings, but there was no agreement on inviting representatives of UN bodies, NGOs, or experts to participate as observers in Bureau meetings. Those in favour of inviting these bodies noted the need to avoid duplication with the many other bodies working on related issues, stressing that this Panel is not a multilateral environmental agreement (MEA). There was support for specifying that the invitation could extend to relevant international organizations, MEA Secretariats, and science-policy bodies. Others specified that the invitation could be for segments of the meetings, if and when appropriate. Three Panel Members objected. The paragraph and alternative suggestions remain in brackets.

**Subsidiary Bodies:** The informal group debated the chapeau text of this section and agreed that the RoP should apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the subsidiary bodies, unless the Plenary decides otherwise by consensus. Some noted the duplication with other agreed-upon rules stating that consensus is required to amend the RoP. They also agreed that each subsidiary body will elect its own officers.

There was agreement to add a new rule requiring each subsidiary body to report to the Plenary on the outcomes of its work.

### *In the Corridors*

Midway through the meeting, delegates were openly wondering which set of decisions would constitute the “minimum bar” and whether they could reach it. Chair Álvarez Pérez had the longest “wishlist”: an adopted RoP, a Bureau, a Secretariat location, a Trust Fund, and the dates of the next session. Everyone agreed that the Bureau was key, but optimism waned from there. Some called for a decision on intersessional work. Others, especially from the African Group, called for a decision on the Secretariat’s location. Some delegates joked that Nairobi would provide warmer conditions than Switzerland to thaw out the “glacial pace” of progress. Privately, one negotiator pointed to the benefits of permanent representation and co-location with chemicals and waste experts and treaty bodies in Geneva.

Applause broke out after a “partial Bureau” was elected by acclamation. 80% of members are now secure for a two-year term. The Asia-Pacific group first proposed using UNEA rules to elect candidates whose nominations were uncontested. Before that, neither the Asia-Pacific Region nor the Eastern European Region had agreed on their two candidates. But by plenary, Asia-Pacific had landed on two members, from China and Saudi Arabia; the nominated members from Japan and Iraq had stepped aside. As another delegate observed, “this limited the challenge to one region, so we could elect at least 80% of the Bureau.”

Work on the RoP proceeded with an emphasis on the Bureau and decision-making, again “reflecting the *what needs to happen* to give the Panel a start,” a delegate sighed. Other rules, like for the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee, could wait, since that body’s advice might not be needed in the immediate future. Watching this unfold, a scientist was dismayed, “I wouldn’t mind putting my name in to be on that Committee, although I’m not sure I’m brave enough, after seeing all this. I’m also not sure when we’ll start talking about science in this science-policy panel.”