

ISP-CWP Highlights: Thursday, 5 February 2026

Members to the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Panel on Chemicals, Waste and Pollution (ISP-CWP) had mixed views on the progress made so far. While some welcomed agreement on some draft rules of procedure (RoP), others expressed concern with the long way to go and the slow pace of work, to the point of suggesting an alternative route to provisionally apply UN Environment Assembly's (UNEA) RoP to provide a legal basis for taking decisions more quickly. After a difficult morning plenary, the contact group on the RoP met, and a small group convened to find a way forward.

Plenary

ISP-CWP Chair Osvaldo Álvarez Pérez (Chile) reported on discussions in the Contact Group, highlighting agreement on some of the rules, including on definitions, membership and operation of the Bureau, decision-making, and the relationship to the foundational document. He proposed continuing the Contact Group's work and providing a report back to plenary on Friday.

Cautioning against the "illusion of progress," COLOMBIA noted that only 12 of 50 rules have been agreed upon, with most of those agreed rules originating from the foundational document. They proposed a "procedural motion" for the Plenary to decide "on an extraordinary basis and for the exclusive purposes of the first session of the Plenary, to provisionally apply UNEA's RoP *mutatis mutandis* until the first session is adjourned or the RoP are adopted, whichever comes first." They suggested that, if the motion is declined, it should be submitted to a vote in accordance with the foundational document and agreed upon decision-making rules (35, 36, and 49).

Colombia's proposal was supported by MEXICO, SWITZERLAND, URUGUAY, GHANA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO, NORWAY, COSTA RICA, DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, the UK, PERU, SENEGAL, CANADA, the EU, AUSTRALIA, CAMEROON, PANAMA, NEW ZEALAND, MALAWI, CHAD, MADAGASCAR, ZIMBABWE, and ZAMBIA. They highlighted the lack of time remaining at this meeting to take important steps toward operationalization of the Panel, lamented the insufficient progress made despite much time and resources having been dedicated to the task of finalizing the RoP, said the current work mode will not enable achievement of the minimum goals set for this week, and

supported the provisional application of UNEA's RoP as a way forward.

Highlighting momentum to achieve progress on the RoP and rejecting Colombia's proposal, Saudi Arabia, for the ASIA-PACIFIC REGION, supported by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, BRAZIL, ARGENTINA, BELARUS, AZERBAIJAN, VENEZUELA, LIBYA, and MAURITIUS, proposed continuing the Contact Group's work until Thursday, 6:00 pm, followed by the provisional adoption of those rules that have been agreed. They urged upholding the consensus enshrined in the foundational document, cautioned about undermining trust and legitimacy in the process, and rejected the application of UNEA's RoP.

On the Colombian proposal, the US, CHINA, EGYPT, and PAKISTAN queried how to vote on the motion, saying that the adoption of UNEA's RoP is a matter of substance and would require consensus. On the Asia-Pacific Region's proposal, KENYA, supported by the US, urged adopting the RoP as a whole document and said that setting a deadline prejudices progress made at this meeting. KENYA highlighted the merits of both proposals and requested time for regional consultations.

COLOMBIA noted that the Plenary had not yet adopted the agenda and that discussions had failed to deliver on the Chair's mandate to lead the Panel to provisionally adopt the RoP by Wednesday. They elaborated on the legal basis of the motion, recalling that rules 35, 36 and 49 were agreed in Punta del Este as a condition for adopting the foundational document, and emphasized the Chair's authority to make a decision on a procedural motion submitted by a Panel Member.

Chair Álvarez Pérez ruled to move forward with the consideration of the motion proposed by Colombia.

SAUDI ARABIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION objected, saying that this exceeded the Chair's mandate, which was only to complete the draft RoP, and urged the Chair to reconsider. In response to a question by the Chair on whether they were challenging the Chair's ruling, SAUDI ARABIA and the RUSSIAN FEDERATION clarified that they were not, but said they were appealing to the Chair's wisdom to withdraw the ruling given the lack of consensus.

Various points of order were made, including by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, SAUDI ARABIA, EGYPT, BRAZIL, KENYA, COLOMBIA, and the US. These mainly referred to bypassed requests for the floor and calls to clarify the Chair's ruling and its legal basis. SAUDI ARABIA said there was a "fundamental

misunderstanding” of the mandate and that the Chair lacked the authority to adopt different RoP. EGYPT stressed that ultimately it was not the Chair but Panel Members’ prerogative to decide what to do.

Chair Álvarez Pérez explained his understanding that he was simply conducting the business of the plenary, with the mandate to work towards the adoption of the draft RoP.

COLOMBIA recalled that one of the key sovereign rights of UN Member States is the right to propose motions, and it is not for other States to object to this right, stressing that the Chair had merely ruled to consider their proposal.

Noting that Colombia’s motion had different components, the US expressed openness to applying some UNEA rules to certain issues, but preferred working on the basis of consensus. They emphasized the need for clarity when considering next steps.

BRAZIL, KENYA, the US, and others expressed regret at the breakdown of order and called for temporarily suspending the session to allow for consideration of the way forward.

MEXICO, supported by EGYPT, reminded all of the UN System Code of Conduct and underscored dialogue, respect and empathy. ANTIGUA AND BARBUDA stressed legal clarity, consistency in the operation of the meeting, and fairness and equity.

The UNEP Legal Officer elaborated on a Chair’s conduct of proceedings in the absence of an adopted RoP, which he said is based on comparable processes and guided by the principles of fairness, transparency, consistency with the mandate, and respect for sovereign rights. He added that, according to practice in intergovernmental meetings, the Chair’s powers include opening and closing meetings, putting questions to a vote, ruling on points of order, and suspending or adjourning meetings or discussions.

The plenary then suspended.

Returning in the afternoon, the interim secretariat displayed the UN System Code of Conduct for harassment-free meetings on the screen. Chair Álvarez Pérez proposed, and delegates agreed, to convene consultations to resolve the impasse on the way forward and to reconvene the contact group, facilitated by Gudi Alkemade (the Netherlands), to continue its work on the draft RoP.

Contact Group

Rules of Procedure: Alkemade proposed, and delegates agreed, to continue work based on the document prepared after the Wednesday’s discussions.

Membership and operation of the Bureau: A Panel Member provided a text proposal on nomination and election of the Bureau based on views previously expressed in the informal group with provisions for the submission of nominations, accepting late submissions, and election processes for different scenarios, among others. Citing the need for simple procedures and urging the use of agreed UN procedures, another Panel Member proposed that members of the Bureau “shall be elected from among the representatives present at the meeting.”

There was convergence on a rule that submissions for Bureau candidates should “preferably” be made eight weeks before elections.

Attempts to distinguish between the election of candidates from regions with uncontested nominations (by acclamation) and

the regions with contested nominations (by a Plenary vote) did not garner consensus. One delegate urged the Panel to respect the sovereign rights of every Panel Member, cautioning against interference with regional decisions. After protracted discussions, delegates were not able to reach consensus.

Divergent views persisted on the need to provide guidance for the selection of candidates. Some delegates highlighted the importance of gender, regional, and institutional balance, while others noted that some operating principles are more relevant to the constitution of the Interdisciplinary Expert Committee (IEC). In nominating members of the Bureau, several attempts were made to find a place to refer to the need to take into account operating principles and approaches set out in the foundational document. Discussions continued in a small drafting group, which came back with a proposal. After some further editorial amendments, the revised language was accepted by the contact group.

Work continued into the night on the Bureau’s membership and operation, and other subsidiary bodies.

In the Corridors

Arriving for the penultimate day, some whispered of progress. Even slight optimism. Chair Álvarez Pérez started on this note, listing which rules were agreed. The optimism soon shattered, as delegates took the floor to call the progress “an illusion.” For them, 12 of 50 rules did not constitute progress. Most of those 12, they said, were cut and pasted from the foundational document or are standard text. In this mirage of progress, these delegates could not envisage a decision on the secretariat’s location, trust fund, intersessional work, or even the adoption of the agenda.

A motion to use the UNEA rules to advance on these issues lit a match to the simmering tensions. Tempers flared, voices raised, fists pounded tables. Some called for civility, empathy, and respect.

After, no one knew how to describe what they had seen: “wild west,” “breakdown,” and “disappointing” were common refrains. Several observers were left puzzled and asked for perspective: “It’s not a treaty. It’s rules of procedure. It’s if Bureau members can be elected or the Chair can represent the Bureau.” Another observer could not work out why any of this mattered: “What is so different about UNEA or Panel rules? Aren’t most of these rules commonplace?”

When the contact group resumed in the afternoon, the discussions were the same as the day before. A member who had objected to UNEA rules all week proposed UNEA rules to simplify one section of the text. The main contention was whether to allow the Plenary to elect Bureau members if a region cannot agree on two candidates for the two positions. Less contentious issues were solved by a drafting group, to brief applause. Meanwhile, somewhere, a small group worked to find any remaining goodwill and a way forward.

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of the ISP-CWP Plenary will be available on Monday, 9 February 2026 at enb.iisd.org/isp-cwp-pl-intergovernmental-science-policy-panel-chemicals-waste-pollution