

SBSTTA 13 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2008

On Tuesday, SBSTTA 13 delegates met in a Committee of the Whole in the morning and two working groups in the afternoon. The Committee of the Whole considered in-depth reviews of the work programmes on agricultural and forest biodiversity; Working Group I considered marine and coastal biodiversity; and Working Group II discussed invasive alien species (IAS) and options for mutually supportive actions addressing climate change under the three Rio conventions.

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME ON AGRICULTURAL BIODIVERSITY: Delegates presented further comments on UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/2. Noting that industrialized agriculture destroys biodiversity and aggravates climate change, VIA CAMPESINA urged the protection of traditional farmers and their crop varieties. GREENPEACE called for scientific criteria, standards, and life-cycle assessments of biofuels, and rejection of quantitative targets for biofuel consumption prior to adequate impact evaluation.

IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME ON FOREST BIODIVERSITY: José Antonio Prado Donoso, FAO, reported on the status of forest biodiversity, explaining that 1.6 billion people depend on forests, deforestation accounts for 17% of global carbon emissions and only 9% of global forests are currently protected. He described joint efforts to improve data on deforestation rates and the development of guidelines for sustainable forest management.

Frances Seymour, Center for International Forestry Research, attributed deforestation to land conversion, infrastructure construction, unsustainable logging, market and governance failures, and uncertain property rights. She highlighted policy tools to address these causes, including eliminating perverse subsidies, establishing market incentives such as certification and clarifying land tenure.

Delegates then turned to the in-depth review of the work programme on forest biodiversity (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/3), including a draft recommendation. Cautioning against duplication of work, many delegates called for close collaboration and joint initiatives with FAO, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests (CPF), the Ramsar Convention and UNFCCC, particularly under the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation Mechanism. BRAZIL noted that

the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF) remains the sole international forum for forest policy. AUSTRIA proposed a CBD-UNFF joint plan of action.

Many countries drew attention to potential negative impacts of biofuel production on forest ecosystems, with some delegates suggesting that COP 9 develop guidelines or standards for impact assessment. BRAZIL and ARGENTINA rejected references to impact assessment and, opposed by BANGLADESH, to integrating climate change response activities into national strategies and action plans. COLOMBIA called for a focus on adaptation strategies.

The EC supported monitoring and assessing climate change impacts through existing mechanisms, while UGANDA called for national and international monitoring networks. GREENPEACE called for a moratorium on deforestation for production of agrofuels, and the GLOBAL FOREST COALITION urged the removal of perverse incentives.

Citing potential risks of genetically modified trees, many countries and NGO participants called for further research and supported the precautionary approach. Liberia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, BRAZIL, and others, underscored the need for technical assistance and capacity building to implement the programme of work, including strengthening monitoring systems, disseminating knowledge, and building capacity for assessing impacts of biofuels.

GERMANY presented outcomes from an expert meeting held on the Isle of Vilm, Germany, including calls for sustainable financing of forest protected areas and strengthening of forest networks. MALAYSIA expressed reservations regarding suggested voluntary financing agreements.

A number of countries criticized the recommendation for its narrow focus on the impacts of climate change, suggesting additional items for consideration, including: governance, illegal logging, non-wood forest products, data collection, discouraging conversion of forest areas, valuation of ecosystem services, and forest restoration.

BELGIUM and CUBA suggested considering external threats to forest biodiversity besides climate change. TUNISIA called for strategies and tools for combating forest fires. The CZECH REPUBLIC urged special attention to the protection of peatlands for carbon sequestration.

BANGLADESH proposed developing a harmonized forest classification system. SWEDEN underscored that certification schemes must be credible to work effectively as market

instruments. Kiribati, for SIDS, requested the inclusion of low-lying island forests. HAITI noted the importance of regional biological corridors for forest ecosystem connectivity.

The FAO FORESTRY DEPARTMENT explained its work with partners to harmonize national level information gathering and reporting on forests. The MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE PROTECTION OF FORESTS IN EUROPE stressed the importance of its cross-sectoral work on sustainable forest management for meeting the 2010 biodiversity target. The INTERNATIONAL INDIGENOUS FORUM ON BIODIVERSITY (IIFB) and the GLOBAL FOREST COALITION stated that indigenous and local communities require full participation in decision-making affecting forests on their territories. GREENPEACE called on delegates to address market, governance and policy failures hampering implementation, including applying measures to combat illegal logging.

WORKING GROUP I

MARINE AND COASTAL BIODIVERSITY: WG I Chair Gabriele Obermayr introduced a document on marine and coastal biodiversity (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/4), including a list of ecological criteria and biogeographic classification systems for marine areas in need of protection, developed at an expert workshop held in October 2007. Ricardo Santos, University of the Azores, Portugal, presented the workshop's outcomes on scientific criteria to identify ecologically and biologically significant and representative marine areas in need of protection in open ocean waters and deep sea habitats.

SLOVENIA and SWEDEN supported recommending that the COP "endorse" the list of criteria developed by the expert workshop, while PORTUGAL, GERMANY, the NETHERLANDS, HAITI, THAILAND and NEW ZEALAND called for "adopting" them. They were opposed by the AFRICAN GROUP, AUSTRALIA, ARGENTINA CHINA, JAPAN, CANADA, and others, who preferred "taking note" of the list. IUCN, GREENPEACE, WWF, and BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL called on delegates to support the criteria and to take immediate concrete action for marine biodiversity protection.

BRAZIL and ICELAND opposed transmitting the report of a workshop on biogeographic classification systems and bioregionalization to the COP, with ICELAND noting that the workshop did not provide for regionally balanced participation. GERMANY supported forwarding the report to the COP and suggested that both the list of criteria and the workshop report be forwarded to the UN *Ad hoc* Working Group on Marine Biodiversity in Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

BRAZIL said that CBD work should focus on developing "technical guidelines" rather than "selection criteria." AUSTRALIA stated that the CBD's mandate extends only to the provision of scientific, technical and technological advice to more specialized bodies such as the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). ARGENTINA, supported by PERU, called for reference to UNCLOS and the International Seabed Authority, while requesting deletion of reference to regional fisheries management organizations (RFMOs). QATAR proposed involving RFMOs in the further elaboration of selection criteria. Kenya, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for scientific and technical capacity building relating to the conservation and use of marine genetic resources.

FAO expressed its support for the criteria and stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement. GREENPEACE and SEA RIGHTS warned of the risks of ocean fertilization.

The IIFB requested that indigenous peoples be involved and measures be taken to guarantee their rights in the establishment of coastal and marine protected areas.

A Friends of the Chair group will meet on Wednesday to prepare a conference room paper.

WORKING GROUP II

INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES: Peter Kenmore, International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), gave an overview of the IPPC's objectives, activities and collaboration with the CBD and other relevant organizations. Delegates then considered a document on gaps in the international regulatory framework on IAS (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/6). The NETHERLANDS, supported by BRAZIL, opposed new legislation or standards covering IAS, while AUSTRALIA and CANADA said that they could not support a process to develop new standards unless more detail on their scope was provided.

NEW ZEALAND suggested liaising with current international standard-setting bodies to address the gaps. Swaziland, for the AFRICAN GROUP, proposed integrating IAS controls into measures to address climate change, biological diversity and food security. The EC noted that the IPPC could enhance efforts to address IAS not only in relation to cultivated plants but also for wild ones.

The SOUTH EAST ASIA REGIONAL INITIATIVES FOR COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT asked for monitoring of impacts of crop and biofuel plant introductions, while the FOREST PEOPLES PROGRAMME reminded delegates to consider both the ecological and social risks of IAS.

BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: Delegates considered options for mutually supportive actions addressing climate change within the three Rio conventions (UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/13/7). SLOVENIA, opposed by BRAZIL, noted that synergies between biodiversity and climate change policies could be maximized through effective cooperation at the level of the subsidiary bodies of the three Conventions and, supported by PORTUGAL and FINLAND, called for a technical expert group on biodiversity, climate change and the development of biodiversity guidance relevant for the Bali Action Plan.

Discussions under this agenda item will continue on Wednesday.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Tuesday saw SBSTTA delegates engaging in those two issues that many expected to be the most difficult ones of the week: marine protected areas and mutually supportive action on climate change. After lengthy debate in WG I on whether to "note," "endorse" or "adopt" criteria for the identification of marine protected areas, some delegates expressed surprise that SBSTTA seemed unable to support the report considering the "caliber" of the scientists behind it. Others however argued that it would be "foolhardy to approve the criteria," owing to their recent publication and subsequent lack of full review. This led one delegate to quip that some delegates seemed to prefer a precautionary approach to science, by "not readily accepting new ideas."

The consideration of climate change and invasive alien species in WG 2 in contrast progressed without incident, with delegates moving swiftly through the agenda items. One delegate commented that "this sets a good pace for the rest of our deliberations." Observing the apparent consensus not to initiate further action on invasive alien species, one delegate joked "as long as we agree on not moving forward, agreement is easily achieved."