



SBSTTA 18 HIGHLIGHTS

TUESDAY, 24 JUNE 2014

On Tuesday, delegates convened in plenary throughout the day and considered marine and coastal biodiversity, and synthetic biology under new and emerging issues. In the evening a contact group on GBO-4 met.

MARINE AND COASTAL BIODIVERSITY: Ecologically or biologically significant marine areas: The Secretariat introduced UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/4 and Add.1, and UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/INF/25, noting reports from the seven regional workshops. Session Chair Alexander Shestakov (Russian Federation) reminded delegates that the definition of EBSAs has been agreed. ITALY stated that describing EBSAs is an evolving process to be improved as regional scientific information becomes available. REPUBLIC OF KOREA stressed the need for additional discussions on how EBSAs can contribute to the conservation of the marine environment.

QATAR, EGYPT and OMAN requested a workshop on the Arabian Gulf to address the dangers and risks for EBSAs in the region, and MALDIVES requested a workshop to identify EBSAs within the Maldives' jurisdiction. SRI LANKA announced it will host a regional workshop to facilitate identification of EBSAs in the Bay of Bengal in 2015. TURKMENISTAN requested help to establish the Caspian Sea as a protected area (PA). GERMANY, supported by BELGIUM and SWEDEN, highlighted the need for workshops to cover all regions, welcomed governments to use EBSA descriptions in national reporting, and, with IUCN, called on other relevant organizations to make use of the EBSA descriptions.

Supporting the incorporation of TK in the identification of EBSAs, South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, with MEXICO, and supported by KENYA, EGYPT, SENEGAL, TOGO, SUDAN, GUINEA and MOZAMBIQUE, suggested the recommendation address socio-economic issues related to EBSAs, and noted the importance of capacity building and linking regional and global efforts through deep-sea research initiatives. KENYA, supported by MALDIVES, lamented the lack of knowledge and information and called for capacity building related to selection and management of EBSAs in deep waters.

CANADA addressed, among others: "hybrid knowledge systems," noting that TK and contemporary science are knowledge systems in their own right; and, with the UNPFII, marine areas of social or cultural significance. The Cook Islands, for ASIA-PACIFIC, noted the importance of TK informing EBSAs and the need to highlight this knowledge as part of EBSA criteria. JAPAN suggested that only TK relevant to scientific and technical knowledge be included in the development of practical options for further work. GUINEA-BISSAU supported enhancing protection of off-shore marine areas within states' jurisdiction and identifying conservation priorities in those areas.

GREECE proposed that the Secretariat collaborate with other organizations to complete the scientific and technical exercise in regions where this information is incomplete.

The NETHERLANDS supported the completion of the EBSA repository, and requested a report on this as soon as possible. BELGIUM suggested that SBSTTA include the regional workshop reports in the repository. CHINA suggested that workshop outcomes be updated to reflect the views of parties' participating scientists.

NORWAY, with ICELAND and FRANCE, called for a disclaimer in the recommendation to clarify that the EBSA process constitutes a scientific and technical exercise and does not interfere with the sovereign rights of countries. BRAZIL stressed non-interference with countries' sovereignty in selecting and managing EBSAs within national jurisdiction. The UK and PORTUGAL said the coastal state must put forward, or agree to the designation of, EBSAs in areas within national jurisdiction.

ARGENTINA noted that the process of identifying EBSAs should not adversely affect the *Ad Hoc* Open-ended Informal Working Group to study issues relating to the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity beyond areas of national jurisdiction (BBNJ).

NORWAY, with ICELAND, noted the need for a peer review mechanism on EBSAs. BRAZIL, with ARGENTINA and CUBA, pointed out that only scientifically peer-reviewed information should be included in the EBSA information-sharing mechanism.

Addressing impacts on marine and coastal biodiversity on underwater noise, marine debris, ocean acidification, and coral bleaching; and developing tools and capacity, including marine spatial planning and training initiatives: Phillip Williamson, University of East Anglia, UK, presented a systematic review on the impacts of ocean acidification on marine biodiversity, contained in UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/INF/6. He noted key findings, including that: ocean acidification is caused by increased levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂), is occurring rapidly and is already having biological impacts; and without action, severe consequences are likely to occur.

Jihyun Lee, CBD Secretariat, presented priority actions to achieve Aichi Target 10 on coral reefs and associated ecosystems, noting that these ecosystems are stressed by, *inter alia*, overfishing, destructive fishing practices and uncontrolled coastal development. She informed delegates that the updated work plan takes into account national reports and NBSAPs, with support from the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and UNEP, among others.

The Secretariat introduced UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/5, 6 and 7, and UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/INF/11, 6, 7/Rev.1, and 23.

On underwater noise, the COOK ISLANDS requested assistance in addressing the gap between pressure on governments to endorse deep-sea mining, and documented negative impacts, including underwater noise. FRANCE, with the UK, supported amendments proposed by the European Expert Meeting report, inviting parties to promote less noisy technology, use measures of spatial and temporal restrictions on noisy activities to reduce their effect on marine



animals, and include regulations on noise management plans for marine protected areas (MPAs). QATAR reported on underwater noise in the Arabian Gulf caused by oil tankers and merchant marine traffic, as well as desalination plants along the coast, noting that the region is working together to formulate local and regional strategies. JAPAN proposed postponing consideration of the development of guidance and toolkits on underwater noise until SBSTTA 19.

NORWAY proposed deleting reference to the development of ship identification systems for a broader range of vessels, expressing concern that this would duplicate IMO's work. MALDIVES emphasized the need for noise-free innovations in motorized sea transport.

The UK noted that impacts of underwater noise should be addressed in the context of other pressures on the marine environment, such as marine pollution and climate change, observing that "ownership of underwater noise should sit with IMO." Highlighting the use of temporal restrictions, GERMANY urged incorporating underwater noise in MPA management plans.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, called for further research to address significant knowledge gaps and, with BRAZIL, encouraged synergies with IMO, International Whaling Commission (IWC) and Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS).

On marine debris, the COOK ISLANDS shared national legislation to manage plastics and synergize with other MEAs to address impacts of marine debris. COLOMBIA noted ongoing work on, *inter alia*, analyzing micro-plastic debris and building capacity for local leaders to address solid waste. EGYPT described ongoing cooperation with the EU under the auspices of the Barcelona Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution.

NORWAY noted discussions on micro-plastics at the ongoing UN Environment Assembly meeting, proposing coordination among the Secretariats to avoid duplication of work. CUBA, with PERU, called for investments to support infrastructure requirements, financial responsibilities and capacity required to maintain responsible fisheries and monitoring systems.

On ocean acidification, CANADA suggested that the new workplan include all vulnerable organisms, rather than focus only on corals. The COOK ISLANDS noted the benefit of establishing large MPAs to allow ecosystem recovery.

The UK expressed reservations on preparing a specific workplan on cold-water corals as elements of a workplan on degradation and destruction of coral reefs, including cold-water corals, are already identified in Decision VII/5 on marine and coastal biodiversity. SWEDEN said the workplan on cold-water corals should be more comprehensive to account for multiple pressures, and proposed it be added to the existing workplan.

Welcoming peer review by parties, INDIA said the specific plan on coral bleaching should be communicated to the UNFCCC and other relevant processes. The EU said the review should be forwarded to the joint liaison meeting of the Rio Conventions and highlighted marine species' vulnerability to rising CO₂ concentrations.

On marine spatial planning, Republic of Korea, on behalf of ASIA-PACIFIC, supported by JAPAN and the COOK ISLANDS, highlighted limited financial and technical resources available at the national and regional levels.

South Africa, for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported building on existing guidance and noted that marine spatial planning can be taken in areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), potentially improving management of those areas.

AUSTRALIA said marine spatial planning is as much about community engagement as it is about scientific input, highlighting small-scale implementation efforts.

NEW AND EMERGING ISSUES: SYNTHETIC BIOLOGY: The Secretariat introduced UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/10, and UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/18/INF/3 and 4. The session was chaired by Yousef Al-Hafedh (Saudi Arabia).

BRAZIL addressed the criteria from Decision IX/29 for an issue to be regarded as "new and emerging" and, with JAPAN, ARGENTINA, AUSTRALIA and EGYPT, but opposed by the EU, AUSTRIA, NORWAY, COSTA RICA, the AFRICAN GROUP and others, stated that a number of requirements are not met. BRAZIL requested the Secretariat to compile and synthesize available information on synthetic biology and submit it to SBSTTA 19.

FRANCE, supported by MEXICO and AUSTRIA, addressed the need to strengthen risk assessment methodologies, including by earmarking part of the funding that is directed towards research on synthetic biology, prior to any environmental release of synthetic biology products.

COSTA RICA and BOLIVIA stated its concern regarding the release of products of synthetic biology in the environment, calling for urgent regulation.

MEXICO, with MALAYSIA, THAILAND and JAPAN, noted that components of synthetic biology that include modern biotechnology techniques and living modified organisms (LMOs), can be dealt with under the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety.

LIBERIA, with QATAR, called for a clear definition of synthetic biology and, with MALAYSIA and the AFRICAN GROUP, proposed inclusion of text in the recommendation to ensure that field testing and commercial use shall not be authorized until a regulatory framework is in place and a robust risk assessment has been carried out.

Ethiopia, for the AFRICAN GROUP, stressed the lack of a legal framework and guidance on risk assessment and, with BOLIVIA, ECUADOR, AUSTRIA and others, the importance of adopting the precautionary principle. SWITZERLAND stressed the need for addressing products of synthetic biology in production and commercialization phases.

The EU underlined, *inter alia*: the need for an agreed definition on synthetic biology before SBSTTA 19; and the inclusion in the recommendation of potential risks and benefits.

South Africa, for LMMCs, underlined, among others: the importance of the precautionary principle and associated challenges regarding necessary scientific information; with JAPAN, the need to prioritize existing efforts and programmes, noting budgetary considerations; and, with EGYPT, coordination with IPBES on knowledge generation and capacity building.

The UK, with BELGIUM, regretted insufficient time for peer review, and requested an extension of the period for inputs from a wide range of experts.

The UK opposed a moratorium on the use of synthetic biology technologies and did not support the extension of the regulatory mechanisms to include socio-economic impacts.

ARGENTINA highlighted that each country has a right to have its own criteria for plant life patentability.

IN THE CORRIDORS

On Tuesday morning, the streets of Montreal were quiet as citizens of the province of Quebec celebrated the annual Saint Jean Baptiste Day, with very few people afoot in the early hours. Meanwhile, the corridors of the ICAO building were abuzz with activity as SBSTTA delegates rolled up their sleeves and got down to work on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas, ocean acidification, marine debris and underwater noise. "We could be here for a month, and not cover half of the marine issues," one delegate feared, while another lamented the difficulty of enforcing marine policies. In the contact group on GBO-4 on Tuesday evening, delegates and the Secretariat took a cue from the World Cup and expertly fielded questions, helping to demystify the various lists of GBO-4 action items. One delegate, whose muffled voice came from under stacks of papers, said "he was getting lost" and delegates responded in the spirit of teamwork by offering to help navigate the group to an agreed list of priority actions to achieve the Aichi Targets.