



IPBES-1 HIGHLIGHTS

WEDNESDAY, 23 JANUARY 2013

On the third day of IPBES-1 in Bonn, delegates met briefly in plenary, hearing updates on institutional arrangements and the nomination of members of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP), and then continued their discussions in two separate contact groups throughout the morning, afternoon and evening. One contact group discussed the rules and procedures for the operations of the plenary of IPBES, and the other addressed the intersessional work required to establish an IPBES work programme for 2014-2018.

INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

LINK BETWEEN THE PLATFORM AND THE UN SYSTEM: Spencer Thomas (Grenada), Chair of the open-ended informal group on the link between IPBES and the UN, reported to the plenary on the previous day's discussions. He said the group agreed on the need to ensure IPBES' scientific independence and suggested the plenary further discuss this agenda item. ARGENTINA and the US favored addressing the issue at a subsequent IPBES session, as no written text had been provided at this point. The Secretariat clarified that a text proposal would be circulated later in the week.

NOMINATION AND SELECTION OF THE MEMBERS OF THE MEP

Session Chair Alfred Apau Oteng-Yeboah reported that the African Group had submitted to the Bureau its list of five MEP nominees. He said the other four regions were still finalizing their MEP nominee selections, and urged these regions to provide their lists by Thursday's plenary.

RULES AND PROCEDURES

In the morning, the contact group co-chaired by Robert Watson (UK) and Leonel Sierralta Jara (Chile) continued its deliberations on rules and procedures for the operations of the plenary of the Platform (IPBES/1/3). Delegates discussed the link between the MEP and the Bureau, *inter alia*: the Bureau's observer status within the MEP; the number of Bureau members to have observer status; and possible benefits of Bureau involvement in the MEP. Delegates agreed that the MEP should not "be tainted by politics." Delegates agreed that initially, all ten Bureau members will have observer status within the MEP, and that this issue will be revisited after an interim period no longer than two years. However, some delegates expressed hesitation, stating that in any case, the chair of the Bureau and the chair of the MEP should not be the same person.

On the term of office for MEP members, the US and NORWAY suggested a five-year term, with BRAZIL, SWITZERLAND, JAPAN and others preferring a three-year term instead. Co-Chair Watson proposed, and delegates accepted, forwarding to the plenary a suggestion of a three-year term, with the possibility of re-election.

With regards to the election of chair(s), delegates agreed the MEP should have the flexibility of organizing its own processes to fulfil its programme of work, including election of its chair(s). The debate on whether it should be within the chair's personal capacity to govern or encourage a regional rotation of the chair(s) remained open. ARGENTINA proposed text referring to an "endeavor to rotate among regions," with NORWAY and the US opposing. Co-Chair Sierralta Jara suggested the panel develop its own rules of procedure, but this debate remained open. Delegates agreed to also revisit the number of MEP meetings, and how to ensure transparency of these meetings, later during the week.

In the afternoon, debate focused on a paragraph on the responsibilities of the MEP chair. The US, CANADA and others supported deleting text implying that the chair's actions be "subject to the procedures the MEP may wish to adopt." They argued that the MEP, being a relatively small body consisting only of scientists, could function adequately without any formal, written procedures. Others, including ARGENTINA, COLOMBIA and LIBERIA, disagreed, noting that any international body needs some kind of written procedures, if only for the sake of transparency. Co-Chair Watson noted that the MEP will have clearly specified terms of reference, determined by the IPBES plenary, and expressed the view that this framework will be sufficient to guide the MEP's work. No agreement was reached on the matter. Delegates also suspended their debate on whether the MEP chair should represent the MEP in discussions on technical and scientific matters in other international meetings. They agreed, however, to delete text on how the MEP chair should conduct his or her work during MEP meetings.

Delegates then addressed decision-making procedures, in particular how to proceed when consensus is not reached. They debated on how to differentiate between substantive and procedural issues, and which strategy to follow if that distinction is controversial. After some discussion, delegates agreed that a two-thirds majority would suffice, and then discussed reporting procedures to reflect this outcome. Some recalled applicable language used in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other reporting procedures with regards to the approval, adoption and acceptance of the respective

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reports. Delegates also referred to text used in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) rules of procedure which notes the role of the chair and voting members regarding matters of procedural or substantive nature, expressing the need to guarantee democratic procedures but also to ensure “hijacking of an issue by one member” does not occur.

In the evening, delegates agreed that modification to the rules of procedure requires consensus, and that proposed modifications should be submitted to all IPBES members eight weeks prior to the session at which they will be discussed, unless the plenary decides otherwise. They also discussed accreditation procedures for observer groups, notably indigenous peoples and local communities. Discussions continued into the evening.

INITIAL WORK PROGRAMME OF THE PLATFORM

The contact group on the initial work programme, co-chaired by Zakri Abdul Hamid (Malaysia) and Ivar Andreas Baste (Norway), met in the morning to discuss a conference room paper on this issue. The group mainly discussed a paragraph on preparing draft work programme elements for the period 2014-2018. Discussion centered on the roles of the Secretariat, the MEP and the Bureau in this process, and which information should be compiled for use in the development of the elements of the work programme.

Ireland, for the EU’s IPBES members, supported by BRAZIL, COLOMBIA and CHINA, suggested that rather than prepare the initial work programme, the Secretariat should gather, and perhaps synthesize, information. CHINA, supported by UGANDA, BRAZIL, the INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SCIENCE (ICSU) and the INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE (IUCN), preferred the MEP to develop the work programme, in consultation with the Bureau. The US, supported by NIGERIA and the PHILIPPINES, but opposed by NORWAY, MEXICO, CHILE, ARGENTINA and BOLIVIA, suggested deleting reference to the Bureau.

BRAZIL, supported by COLOMBIA, but opposed by NORWAY and MOROCCO, suggested deleting text on taking into account relevant decisions made by the governing bodies of multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), with the US proposing, and NORWAY agreeing, to refer to “relevant requests” instead. The CONVENTION ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN ENDANGERED SPECIES (CITES) expressed concern regarding the suggestion to delete the reference to the governing bodies of MEAs, stressing that this would be a loss, since the MEAs can provide relevant scientific information.

MEXICO, supported by SOUTH AFRICA, highlighted the need for the proposal to incorporate the agreed four functions of IPBES: knowledge generation, scientific assessments, policy support and capacity-building. The contact group Co-Chairs Zakri and Baste suggested not specifying which body would develop the draft work programme elements, and simplifying the text to request the Secretariat to compile the available information.

In the afternoon, in response to the concern raised earlier by CITES, BRAZIL explained that the deletion was not intended to deny the importance of collaborating with the MEAs, but that reference to the MEAs should rather be made elsewhere in the text. ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL, proposed also taking into account relevant requests, inputs and submissions by MEAs in the development of the draft work programme, with BRAZIL,

opposed by NORWAY, proposing the deletion of their decisions. There was debate about whether IPBES should “take note” or “take account” of these requests. No conclusion was reached.

GUATEMALA, supported by BRAZIL, the US, KENYA and SWITZERLAND, suggested deleting reference to specific institutional arrangements in text suggesting options for institutional arrangements that may be necessary for implementation of the work programme, while FIJI preferred to maintain the reference to working groups.

JAPAN suggested the draft work programme be circulated to the members with cost estimates, with some delegates suggesting that these cost estimates be indicative. Ireland, for the EU’s IPBES members, identified a role for the Bureau in this regard, with BRAZIL and SOUTH AFRICA questioning this role. The US, opposed by GHANA and Ireland for the EU’s IPBES members, preferred that the Bureau play no role in considering the comments resulting from the consultation process.

On receiving and prioritizing requests put to the Platform, NORWAY suggested including reference to joint submissions by multiple governments.

BOLIVIA stressed the need to bring together the debates on the conceptual framework and knowledge systems. With regard to the proposed drafting workshops, Co-Chair Baste suggested organizing the proposed workshop on knowledge systems before the one on the conceptual framework. COLOMBIA highlighted the role of the conceptual framework in integrating the four IPBES functions, and GUATEMALA supported the recognition of diversity of knowledge.

In the evening, BRAZIL and the US emphasized that the conceptual framework should reflect the four functions of IPBES, and opposed singling out knowledge systems in this context. No agreement was reached on this issue. Co-Chairs Zakri and Baste suggested revisiting these issues on Thursday.

On the scoping process and procedures relating to reports and deliverables, the debate centered around the respective roles of the Bureau and the MEP. Discussions continued into the evening.

IN THE CORRIDORS

As IPBES-1 approached its midway point, many delegates were frustrated with the pace of work. The contact group on the initial work programme appeared to be struggling with its focus, as all discussions seemed to return to – and get stuck on – the question of how the Bureau and the MEP would relate to each other. This stalled progress on the basic question of how the work programme would be established. With only one out of 23 paragraphs addressed in an entire morning session, one delegate despaired that participants would “surely be convicted to late-night sessions later in the week.” Similar sentiments were heard surrounding the progress of the contact group on rules and procedures – although the negotiations in both groups seemed to pick up later in the day.

At the same time, many were pleased that the meeting had acknowledged the need to ensure the multidisciplinary character of the MEP. They hoped that the regions’ struggle with reducing the number of their MEP nominees would prove to be worthwhile, allowing only the very best scientists to be elected into this important IPBES body. In this context, however, one delegate pointed out that the best scientists are not necessarily the best suited for cooperation in international processes.