



**Governing Council  
of the United Nations  
Environment Programme**

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Items 4 (a) and 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Policy issues: State of the environment: Follow-up to and implementation  
of the outcomes of United Nations summits and major intergovernmental meetings,  
including the decisions of the Governing Council**

**Intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and  
ecosystem services**

**Report by the Executive Director**

*Summary*

The present report is submitted to the Council/Forum at its twenty-fifth session in accordance with the recommendations made at the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 10 to 12 November 2008. It contains suggested action on the further process to consider such a platform.

\* UNEP/GC.25/1.

## I. Suggested action by the Council

1. The Governing Council may wish to consider adopting a decision along the following lines:

*The Governing Council,*

*Recalling* its main functions and responsibilities set out in General Assembly resolution 2997 (XXVII) of 15 December 1972, under which the Governing Council is, among other things, to promote the contribution of the relevant international scientific and other professional communities to the acquisition, assessment and exchange of environmental knowledge and information and, as appropriate, to the technical aspects of the formation and implementation of environmental programmes within the United Nations system,

*Noting* the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and its follow-up process, the consultative process towards an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity, and decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity,

*Noting also* the outcomes of the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services held in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 10 to 12 November 2008,

*Expressing* its appreciation to the Government of Malaysia for hosting that meeting,

*Recognizing* the need to strengthen and improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being, including giving consideration to the establishment of a new science-policy platform,

*Having considered* the report by the Executive Director,<sup>1</sup>

1. *Invites* Governments and relevant organizations to continue to explore mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development, which could include components of early warning, multiple-scale assessments, policy information and capacity-building;

2. *Requests* the Executive Director to undertake a further process to support efforts by Governments and relevant organizations to explore mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development;

3. *Also requests* the Executive Director to convene, for the purpose indicated in paragraph 2 above, a second intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources;

4. *Invites* Governments and organizations in a position to do so to provide extrabudgetary resources for the above-mentioned process.

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1 UNEP/GC.25/15.

## II. Background

2. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrated that, over the past 50 years, humankind has caused unprecedented losses in biodiversity and declines in ecosystem services. In fact, 60 per cent of the 24 assessed ecosystem services are in decline and further degradation is expected if immediate action is not taken. This would have a negative impact on development processes in all countries, but in particular, on developing countries.

3. Scientific knowledge on the links between biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being has increased significantly since the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment was completed in 2005. There is, however, a need for a stronger international science-policy interface to enable emerging scientific knowledge to be translated into specific policy action at the appropriate levels.

4. The current science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services comprises a number of national and international programmes, organizations, mechanisms and processes. The biodiversity and ecosystem-related multilateral environmental agreements, for example, contain provisions on scientific and technical cooperation. Their contribution to policymaking at the appropriate levels could, however, be strengthened further if an intergovernmental science-policy platform were able to provide a scientifically sound, uniform and consistent framework for tackling changes to biodiversity and ecosystem services.

5. The report by the European Environment Agency, "*Late lessons from early warnings: the precautionary principle 1896–2000*", identifies a gap between scientific findings and policy responses. There is therefore a need for a mechanism to convey the findings from the scientific community to the needs of the policy communities in a timely manner and vice versa.

6. The consultation towards an international mechanism for scientific expertise on biodiversity and the global strategy on Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up both reflect a general agreement on the need for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. This need was further strengthened by decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting, held in May 2008, which welcomed the agreement of the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to convene an ad hoc open-ended intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting to consider establishing an efficient international science-policy interface on biodiversity, ecosystem services and human well-being, and invited Parties to ensure that appropriate science and policy experts were made available to attend, and also encouraged the participation of experts from various regions and disciplines.

## III. Process

7. In October 2007, at the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up workshop, partners felt that Millennium Ecosystem follow-up should inform the consultative process towards an international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity. A statement from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up partners in this regard was submitted at the mechanism's international steering committee meeting, held in Montpellier, France, in November 2007.

8. The statement from that meeting invited the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an intergovernmental meeting to explore the options of merging the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment follow-up process and the mechanism consultative process with the objective of considering the establishment of an efficient international science-policy interface.

9. A concept note was prepared by UNEP detailing the needs and rationale for an intergovernmental multi-stakeholder platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The document was made available as an information document to the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at its ninth meeting, held in May 2008, and was presented at the side event.

10. Decision IX/15 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity welcomed the initiative by the Executive Director of UNEP to convene an ad hoc open-ended intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting to consider establishing such a platform and to invite Parties to send their science and policy experts thereto.

11. Based on the comments received from Governments and organizations attending the ninth meeting of the Conference, the concept note was revised and sent out to all countries for review. An open peer review process was undertaken electronically for six weeks. In total, 588 comments were received from 30 countries and 27 organizations. The concept note was revised accordingly for

consideration at the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services.

#### **IV. Outcomes of the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services**

12. The Executive Director convened the ad hoc intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services in Putrajaya, Malaysia, from 10–12 November 2008, hosted by the Government of Malaysia. The meeting was attended by representatives from Algeria, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, China, Colombia, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kiribati, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Myanmar, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, Niue, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Palau, Panama, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Romania, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Togo, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Viet Nam, Yemen and Zambia.

13. Representatives from the following United Nations bodies, convention secretariats and other organizations also attended the meeting: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Scientific and Technical Advisory Panel of the Global Environment Facility, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations University Institute of Advance Studies, Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity, Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Secretariat of the Ramsar Convention, Secretariat of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, European Commission, ASEAN Secretariat, ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, Biodiversity International, Birdlife International, David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Diversitas, European Platform for Biodiversity Research Strategy, Global Biodiversity Information Facility, Global Change System for Analysis, Research and Training, Institut du Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales, International Union of Forest Research Organizations, International Council for Science, International Institute for Sustainable Development, International Mechanism of Scientific Experts on Biodiversity, International Union for Conservation of Nature and World Resources Institute.

14. There was general agreement among the participants that there was a genuine need to strengthen the science-policy interface. Participants felt that the main areas of potential work for the platform or panel were: early warning and horizon scanning; multi-scale assessments; policy information; and capacity-building. Participants were of the view that the Executive Director should seek guidance from the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum regarding a process for finding the best option to strengthen the science-policy interface. A detailed description of the main outcomes of the meeting may be found in the Chair's summary, which is reproduced in the annex to the present report, while the working documents submitted to the meeting may be found in document UNEP/GC.25/INF/32.

#### **V. Way forward**

15. As an immediate follow-up to the meeting, UNEP has been requested to undertake a preliminary gap analysis for the purpose of facilitating the continuing discussions on how to strengthen the science-policy interface. The report will be made available to the Council/Forum as an information document (UNEP/GC.25/INF/30), which would later be reviewed and further refined.

16. As recommended at the meeting, subject to the decision of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, the Executive Director will be required to undertake a further process, including convening a second intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, with the view to strengthening and improving the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being.

## Annex

### Summary by the Chair: Putrajaya Road Map

1. Following the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the international mechanism of scientific expertise on biodiversity consultations and decision IX/15 of the ninth meeting of the Parties of Convention on Biological Diversity, the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) convened a meeting to consider establishing an efficient intergovernmental science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development.
2. There was uniform recognition of the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem services, which are currently experiencing significant loss and are critically important for human well-being, particularly poverty alleviation. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment demonstrated that, over the past 50 years, humanity had caused unprecedented losses in biodiversity and declines in ecosystem services. In all, 60 per cent of the 24 assessed ecosystem services were in decline and further degradation was expected if immediate action was not taken. That would in particular, but not exclusively, have a negative impact on the development processes in developing countries.
3. The meeting documents were based on a concept note prepared by UNEP and reviewed by Governments and stakeholders.
4. Participants from 78 countries and 25 organizations met in Putrajaya, Malaysia, to discuss needs and modalities to strengthen the science-policy interface on biodiversity and ecosystem services, including the potential of an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services.
5. For three days there was a highly constructive exchange of views on the concept, content and structure of a potential intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services, with the current meeting being viewed as the first step towards strengthening the science-policy interface.
6. There was broad recognition that there was a need to improve the science-policy interface, which should use existing relevant assessments and the best available multidisciplinary knowledge (i.e., natural, social and economic sciences, including traditional and indigenous knowledge).
7. Most participants recognized that there were currently numerous national and international science-policy interfaces (mechanisms and processes) for biodiversity and ecosystem services. Those participants expressed the need for a gap analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the existing interfaces and coordination among them at all spatial scales (including the scientific subsidiary and advisory bodies of relevant biodiversity-related multilateral environment agreements and United Nations bodies). The gap analysis should also assess the potential for strengthening existing interfaces and the added value of a potential new mechanism that would overcome the recognized weaknesses in the current system. Participants had differing views as to which gaps in the science-policy interface were most significant, with some participants noting the lack of an effective assessment process that provided policy-relevant information and advice to multiple biodiversity-related conventions, while most developing country participants viewed the greatest gap as capacity-building.
8. To complement and add value to the existing mechanisms, many participants supported the need for an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services that would be distinct and independent from existing institutions or mechanisms. Others, however, considered that it was too early to conclude whether there was a need for a new and independent body, preferring to wait for the results of the gap analysis.
9. While there was broad agreement that the platform should be intergovernmental, a range of views were expressed on how to involve other stakeholders.
10. It was argued that any new body must complement existing mechanisms, have added value and therefore strengthen existing mechanisms. Some participants suggested that a network of networks could enhance current capabilities.
11. Many participants supported the proposal that the platform should be independent but linked to an existing organization or organizations (e.g., UNEP with other United Nations organizations such as the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization). They also expressed the view that the platform should serve a range of stakeholders, including multiple biodiversity-related

conventions. Some participants supported the platform being a subsidiary body to the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Most participants noted that if the platform were to be a subsidiary of a single convention then it would be difficult to serve other stakeholders and conventions, though one participant noted that it would be difficult for a single body to serve many different forums.

12. Many participants agreed that the role of a science-policy platform should be to compile, assess and synthesize existing scientific knowledge, thereby indentifying areas of science requiring further development, and to provide policy-relevant information to multiple stakeholders, including multilateral environmental agreements, without being policy-prescriptive. One participant suggested that a framework for contextualizing existing and future assessments could be useful.

13. Many participants stated that the assessment should be independent, but policy-relevant, to provide credible, evidence-based knowledge.

14. Most participants noted that the assessments and other activities should be demand-driven, depending on user requests, with some noting the importance of input from the scientific community. The assessments would include:

- (a) Assessments at the local, national, and regional level, which would be promoted, catalysed and synthesized by the platform, but not necessarily undertaken by it;
- (b) Thematic assessments (e.g., regional impact of climate change on biodiversity);
- (c) Global assessments (e.g., Millennium Ecosystem Assessment).

15. There was broad agreement that the assessments must have a rigorous peer review.

16. With regard to document UNEP/IPBES/1/3 on the programme of work and budget, there was broad agreement that the discussion on the detailed programme of work and budget was premature, although a work programme and budget would be needed later.

17. Some participants suggested that the early warning and lessons activity (3 (a)) was an important activity in its own right, while others suggested that it could be integrated into the assessment processes (activity 3 (b)), as outlined in document UNEP/IPBES/1/3. One participant recommended that the two main activities of any new mechanism should be capacity-building and assessment, rather than the broader suite of activities outlined in document UNEP/IPBES/1/3, with capacity-building being incorporated into those other activities.

18. There was broad agreement that the platform should include building capacity in developing countries in respect of assessing and using knowledge. Some participants suggested that capacity-building was an integral part of the assessment process.

19. Even though there was general agreement that the discussion on legal status was premature, there was a very useful preliminary discussion of views. In general there was strong support for options B<sup>2</sup> or D,<sup>3</sup> with some support for option C,<sup>4</sup> but without removing any options from the table.

20. There was broad agreement that detailed discussion of the governance paper was premature concerning the plenary, scientific body and executive body. There was, however, some support for the platform to use the structure of a body akin to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Two participants suggested that the plenary could be the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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2 Option B: The platform is established as an intergovernmental body whose status is distinct from the existing intergovernmental organizations but is institutionally linked with one or more of the existing international organizations (e.g., through the provision of the secretariat or administrative services therefore). It might be established by a decision of an intergovernmental conference or by a decision of an existing intergovernmental organization or concurrent decisions of two or more intergovernmental organizations.

3 Option D: The platform is established as a body in which intergovernmental and non-governmental entities are combined and is distinct from the existing intergovernmental organizations. It might be established by a decision of an intergovernmental or other international conference.

4 Option C: The platform is established as an intergovernmental body, which is a subsidiary body of an existing intergovernmental organization. It might be established by a decision of the governing body of an existing intergovernmental organization).

21. Several participants suggested the need for criteria and a transparent process for selecting the secretariat. There was agreement that it should be a small secretariat, with one participant suggesting the use of an existing secretariat if the proposed platform was a subsidiary body of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Several participants offered to support and host a secretariat.

22. There was no discussion on document UNEP/IPBES/1/5.

23. The Chair recommended:

(a) That mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being and sustainable development should continue to be explored. Such mechanisms could include components of early warning, multiple-scale assessments, policy information and capacity development;

(b) That a gap analysis should be undertaken for the purpose of strengthening the science-policy interface and that a preliminary report should be made available at the twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum.

24. The meeting recommended that the Executive Director of UNEP should report at the twenty-fifth session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum on the outcome of the present meeting and that the Governing Council should request the Executive Director to convene a second intergovernmental multi-stakeholder meeting on an intergovernmental science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystem services with the view to strengthening and improving the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for human well-being, including consideration of a new science-policy platform. One participant further requested that the outcome of the meeting should be presented at the third meeting of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Working Group on Review of Implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

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