



# UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

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## United Nations Environment Programme

### North American Scientific Consultation on an Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)

Co-Sponsored by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Committee for  
DIVERSITAS (the “NAS Committee for DIVERSITAS”)

and

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN)

National Academy of Sciences  
Washington, D.C., April 27, 2010

### Report of the Consultation UNEP's Regional Office for North America (RONA)

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UNEP RONA, in cooperation with the NAS Committee for DIVERSITAS and IUCN, convened approximately 45 representatives of the Canadian and U.S. Governments, non-governmental organizations, the World Bank, and academia to seek additional inputs from UNEP's North American region on the possible establishment of an IPBES mechanism, which will be the subject of an intergovernmental discussion that will take place on 7-11 June 2010 in Pusan, the Republic of Korea. The Consultation Agenda and the Participants List are attached.

#### I. Welcoming Remarks

**Amy Fraenkel**, Director of RONA, opened the meeting, welcoming participants and thanking the sponsors. She noted that the purpose of the Consultation was to seek inputs from scientific experts in UNEP's North American Region on the need for and elements of an IPBES, which was under discussion by governments and interested stakeholders as part of a UNEP-led process. The purpose of an IPBES would be to more effectively provide policy makers with scientific, technical and other relevant data on biodiversity and ecosystem services, much as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has served this role in the area of climate change. She noted that the UNEP Governing Council had authorized a third and final meeting on whether to establish an IPBES, which is set to take place 7 – 11 June in Korea.

**Kerri-Ann Jones**, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, provided opening remarks. She noted that the U.S. Government strongly supports the role of science in policy making. She observed that

providing such knowledge in the case of biodiversity and ecosystem services is important, yet challenging. She noted that it is important that any such mechanism be dynamic and non-bureaucratic. She welcomed the present consultation, and noted that the U.S. Government would be convening a meeting of scientists on using science in policy making in the upcoming week to prepare for the discussions on IPBES in Korea.

**Dan Wicklum**, Director General of the Water, Science and Technology Directorate at Environment Canada, also gave opening remarks by teleconference. He remarked on the long history of discussions that had taken place even prior to the current UNEP process on the issue of improving the flow of information on biodiversity to policy makers. He noted that the meeting in Korea is critical because many countries feel that further discussion on whether or not to launch an IPBES would not be productive. The goal of the Korea meeting is to determine whether or not to launch an IPBES. If it is decided that an IPBES should be created, key decisions on scope and operating principles will also need to be taken. He said he hoped that the participants and stakeholders would actively participate in the on-going consultations and give their best advice on the IPBES proposal, as the stakes in biodiversity and ecosystem services are high.

## **II. Moderated Panel Discussion: IPBES and the Science-Policy Interface**

In the Panel discussion, speakers made the following points:

- Biodiversity is a complex issue that has not received adequate attention. While there have been some gains in protecting the planet's biological heritage, we still are falling rapidly behind the corrective steps that are needed. It is important to elevate the science of biodiversity to give it the status it deserves; otherwise we face a climate and biological meltdown.
- There is a genuine need for an IPBES to bring the required scientific understanding of biodiversity and ecosystem services to the attention of policy makers. The IPCC experience in addressing the science of climate change gives a good example of the structure and approaches to achieving that and improved approaches that should be undertaken.
- A key improvement over the IPCC process would be to speed up the process of scientific information and analysis input and consideration. The information and analysis should be sound and independent, and a properly developed international platform could provide this.
- An essential element for success in providing the science is to involve governments in establishing a mechanism that will gain their ownership and obtain their financial backing. It is also important to win broader public support for the science and the mechanism.
- Key elements for the success of an IPBES platform would be saliency (i.e. relevancy), credibility stemming from transparency; independence and peer review.

- The way to frame the scientific issues would be through providing a clear mandate and goals, establishing a realistic timeline, providing strong leadership, creating appropriate support tools, and shaping a carefully designed and engaging communications plan.
- Major problems that should be addressed to assist in conveying the science and the urgency of the biodiversity issues are finding a way to link and communicate among the 60 or 70 international agreements on biodiversity and synthesizing the findings of the many scientific and policy journals in the fields.
- Among the more critical roles of an IPBES platform is defining the kinds of assessments that need and can be developed and specifying the scale of these assessments. Many functions should be considered, among them health, agriculture, forests, fisheries, water, and the interactions among these functions specified.
- Another role for an IPBES would be the reporting function, which should be neutral and not policy prescriptive. It should provide relevant data and seek to use relevant decision models, notably those on the social processes that are affected and interact with the biosphere. The models should incorporate the human response to the ecosystem impacts, as an understanding of these impacts is valuable for helping to shape capacity building efforts.

### **III. Plenary Session Questions and Answers**

In the question and answer period in the plenary session the assessment function was widely discussed. Among the issues and key points raised were the following:

- It is important to know what the scale would be of the assessments of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Global assessments would give a broad picture of the planetary impacts of changes, while local assessments, because local effects were often more visible and tangible, could more readily stimulate action. Regional impacts were valuable to help policy makers and inspire international transboundary cooperation. In the end, it appeared that of the broad range of global, regional, sub-regional and local assessments each had its need and merits.
- Assessments should also be accompanied by scenarios to make them forward looking; as not all countries have the capacity to conduct assessments and scenarios, means must be found to distribute existing ones broadly .
- There is an urgent need for more rapid assessments, because the situation requires it and policy makers need them, though they are not easy to do. The human response always seems to lag behind the evolving problems, so we must strive to expedite understanding and actions to address them.
- Assessments are essential to decisionmakers and, in that regard, in making assessments one needs to “focus on the user” and make clear what the changes in biological diversity and ecosystem services will mean for human society.
- Economists are beginning to see the link between biological diversity and ecosystem services and human welfare.
- Many assessments can be achieved with existing information but we also need to identify where new information and research is required.

- All assessments would be useful in providing the information and knowledge needed for and helpful in providing capacity building for developing countries.
- The ecosystem services component should be emphasized in assessments because it shows where the payoff and the benefits to individuals and communities are.
- One of the major challenges in the assessment process is to integrate the various pieces of the problem and the disciplines required to develop required policy maker understanding.
- There is a need in making assessments to emphasize that much of what is happening and the root causes of what is happening are the result of human behavior and actions.
- Biodiversity and ecosystem services are not the same, and the scientific community has not done an adequate job at explaining the distinction between them. There should be a dialogue among the disciplines to help make the distinction clear.
- It is important in that respect to keep both biological diversity and ecosystem services within the IPBES mandate.
- In addressing the problems facing biodiversity and ecosystem services we need “to think on a big scale” because the problems will get worse the longer they last.

#### **IV. Reports of the Working Groups**

The plenary broke briefly into two working groups, one to identify issues, questions, priorities and mechanisms for assessments and the other to outline how IPBES could best ensure broad engagement of different knowledge sources, and to examine what kinds of capacity issues exist.

Among the main points made in Group I were the following:

- A possible different means to gather information for biological diversity and ecosystem services might be a Wikipedia approach, though some members questioned how this information would be verified and whether the approach would be acceptable to governments.
- Among the objectives that IPBES should accomplish might be regular assessments, identifying critical problems and suggesting solutions, providing scenarios and place-based analyses, relating closely to policymakers, providing information for the whole policy community, and helping to settle knowledge controversies.
- An IPBES platform would need to be aware of climate change’s influence on biodiversity and ecosystem services as well as the various related treaties and the specific needs of a variety of information users, such as those of governments and industry.
- Attention should be given to streamlining the IPBES mechanism.
- Consideration should also be given to the potential values of forming regional nodes to assist in the assessment process.

- Identifying opportunities for and objectives of capacity building should get an important focus.

Group II explored in some detail the question of what types of assessments would be made and ways to supplement them. Among its conclusions were:

- The IPBES platform should consider preparing several preliminary assessments followed by cross-cutting in-depth ones.
- Assessments would be particularly valuable in stimulating additional scientific thought and spurring stakeholders to focus on critical issues.
- There are a number of existing or planned biological diversity analyses that could be used to complement the work of the IPBES, such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment and some 35 related regional assessments, many now underway; ICSU research; the Global Marine Assessment; UNEP's GEO 5; the Global Biodiversity Outlook, and working documents of the World Resources Institute that are designed for specific stakeholders, such as the business community and multilateral development banks, related to biodiversity issues.

## V. Closing Comments and Observations

In concluding remarks, **Mary Beth West**, Director of the IUCN office in Washington, D.C. said she found the Consultation interesting and productive. She said key take-away points for her were (1) the importance of independent scientific assessment, (2) the criticality of government ownership and buy-in to IPBES' work, (3) the need for addressing early the broader public communication needs, (4) the effort needed to direct thematic work to critical problems, and (5) the requirement to make the institution or institutions created focused, nimble and streamlined to be effective and at a reasonable cost.

**UNEP RONA Director Amy Fraenkel** thanked the moderator, presenters, participants, sponsors and the host organization. She noted that the PowerPoint presentations would be available on the UNEP RONA website, that UNEP RONA would prepare a brief report of the meeting that it would post on its Website, and that UNEP would welcome any additional contributions that participants wished to provide on the IPBES issue.