

Press release

IPBES takes big steps for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

First meeting of newly established IPBES

Bonn, 27 January 2013

A new international science-policy platform on biodiversity and ecosystems, set up to assist governments and citizens to better understand the state, trends and challenges facing the natural world and humanity in the 21st century, has today put in place many of the administrative and staffing structures needed to implement its important work.

Over 500 delegates, including from most of the 105 Member States of the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), attended the first plenary meeting of the platform (IPBES-1), held in Bonn, Germany this week.

M. Zakri, Science Advisor to the Prime Minister of Malaysia and Chairman of the Malaysian Professors' Council was "truly honoured and most humbled to be elected as the first Chair of the Platform". M. Zakri has extensive experience in biodiversity governance at the national and international levels.

The meeting also took this opportunity to elect an international group of renowned experts, the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel (MEP), which will ensure the scientific credibility and independence of the IPBES work.

IPBES-1 also decided that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) will provide the Secretariat for the Platform, which will operate from Bonn in Germany and requested UNEP, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to establish an institutional link with the Platform through a collaborative partnership arrangement for the work of IPBES and its Secretariat.

M. Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director mentioned in his opening statement that "the Secretariat of UNEP is privileged to be at the service of IPBES" and that it "stands ready to contribute to the future work of the platform in close collaboration with its UN partners".

Even before IPBES can receive formal requests, expectations for the Platform are high. Braulio Ferreira de Souza Dias, Executive Secretary of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), when delivering a joint statement of the six biodiversity-related conventions said that, "by working closely together, IPBES and the conventions can support their common objectives of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity

and maintenance of ecosystem services for human well-being.” The Conventions of the Parties (COP) to the CBD has already requested IPBES to contribute to the preparation of the next global assessment on biodiversity and ecosystem services, to be launched in 2018, and to help countries to implement the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and achieve the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. Similarly, requests have been made from the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) and the Ramsar Convention to support their work on the conservation and sustainable use of migratory species of wild animals and on wetlands respectively.

The meeting also requested the development of a stakeholder engagement strategy for IPBES. It is expected that the scientific community, civil society, the business and industry sector, as well as representatives from indigenous peoples and local communities, will act both as contributors and end users of the Platform.

Anne Larigauderie, Diversitas’ Director Executive, leading the International Council for Science (ICSU) delegation to the meeting and Cyriaque Sendashonga, Global Director of the Policy and Programme Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), speaking on behalf of a group of more than 100 stakeholders present at the meeting, stressed that “the participation of all relevant stakeholders in IPBES is key for the relevance, impact, credibility and legitimacy of the platform.”

IPBES set-up to protect the planet’s biodiversity, its ecosystems and the services they provide to humanity

IPBES was established in April 2012 in Panama City, Panama, and currently has 105 Member States.

The Platform is an independent intergovernmental body open to all member countries of the United Nations.

Its members are committed to building IPBES as the leading intergovernmental body for assessing the state of the planet’s biodiversity, its ecosystems and the essential services they provide to society.

Biodiversity from terrestrial, marine, coastal, and inland water ecosystems provides the basis for ecosystems and the services they provide that underpin human well-being. However, biodiversity and ecosystem services are declining at an unprecedented rate and the world failed to reach the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of a significant reduction in the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010.

In order to address this challenge, adequate local, national and international policies need to be adopted and implemented. To achieve this, decision makers need scientifically credible and independent information that takes into account the complex relationships between biodiversity, ecosystem services, and people. They also need

effective methods to interpret this scientific information in order to make informed decisions. The scientific community also needs to understand the needs of decision makers better in order to provide them with the relevant information. In essence, the dialogue between the scientific community, governments, and other stakeholders on biodiversity and ecosystem services needs to be strengthened.

IPBES was established to this end. It provides a mechanism recognized by both the scientific and policy communities to synthesize, review, assess and critically evaluate relevant information and knowledge generated worldwide by governments, academia, scientific organizations, non-governmental organizations and indigenous communities. This involves a credible group of experts in conducting assessments of such information and knowledge in a transparent way.

IPBES is unique in that it will aim to strengthen capacity for the effective use of science in decision-making at all levels. IPBES will also aim to address the needs of Multilateral Environmental Agreements that are related to biodiversity and ecosystem services, and build on existing processes ensuring synergy and complementarities in each other's work.

Next steps for IPBES

An ambitious agenda has been set by the meeting, paving the way for the second meeting of the platform (IPBES-2), where IPBES's forward-looking work programme is expected to be agreed.

The IPBES Secretariat should also be fully staffed and operational by the end of IPBES-2, provisionally scheduled for the end of 2013.

Notes for editors

1. State of the world's biodiversity and ecosystem services

Alarming figures from the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) Global Environment Outlook-5 (GEO-5) include:

- With more than 30 per cent of the Earth's land surface used for agricultural production, some natural habitats have been shrinking by more than 20 per cent since the 1980s.
- The world lost over 100 million hectares of forest from 2000 to 2005, and has lost 20 per cent of its sea grass and mangrove habitats since 1970 and 1980 respectively.

- In some regions, 95 per cent of wetlands have been lost. Two-thirds of the world's largest rivers are now moderately to severely fragmented by dams and reservoirs.
- Vertebrate populations have declined on average by 30 per cent since 1970; around 20 per cent of vertebrate species are now under threat.
- The extinction risk is increasing faster for corals than for any other group of living organisms, with the condition of coral reefs declining by 38 per cent since 1980. Rapid contraction is projected by 2050.

2. The four areas of work of IPBES are the following:

- To identify and prioritise key scientific information needed for policymakers and to catalyse efforts to generate new knowledge;
- To perform regular and timely assessments of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interlinkages;
- To support policy formulation and implementation by identifying policy-relevant tools and methodologies; and
- To prioritise key capacity building needs to improve the science-policy interface, and to provide and call for financial and other support for the highest-priority needs related directly to its activities.

3. IPBES overview - role, mandate and key principles:

- To collaborate with existing initiatives on biodiversity and ecosystem services, including Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), United Nations bodies and networks of scientists and knowledge holders, to fill gaps and build upon their work, while avoiding duplication;
- To be scientifically independent and ensure credibility, relevance and legitimacy through the peer review of its work and transparency in its decision-making processes;
- To use clear, transparent and scientifically credible processes for the exchange, sharing and use of data, information and technologies from all relevant sources, including non-peer-reviewed literature, as appropriate;
- To recognise and respect the contribution of indigenous and local knowledge to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems;
- To provide policy-relevant information, but not policy-prescriptive advice, mindful of the respective mandates of the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs);
- To integrate capacity building into all relevant aspects of its work according to priorities decided by the plenary;
- To recognise the unique biodiversity and scientific knowledge thereof within and among regions, and also recognise the need for the full and effective

- participation of developing countries and for balanced regional representation and participation in its structure and work;
- To take an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach that incorporates all relevant disciplines, including social and natural sciences;
 - To recognise the need for gender equity in all relevant aspects of its work;
 - To address terrestrial, marine and inland water biodiversity and ecosystem services and their interactions; and
 - To ensure the full use of national, subregional and regional assessments and knowledge, as appropriate.

4. The six Biodiversity-related conventions are:

- The Convention on Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS);
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
- The International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA);
- The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands;
- The World Heritage Convention (WHC); and
- The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD).

More information on IPBES including on the current MEP and Bureau Members is available at: www.ipbes.net

Also see the resources page at: www.ipbes.net/resources

For further information, please contact:

Nick Nuttall

Spokesperson and Acting Director, UNEP Division of Communication and Public Information

Tel. +41 795 965 737 or +254 733 632 755

or email nick.nuttall@unep.org

Shereen Zorba

Head, UNEP Newsdesk

Tel +254 788 526 000

or e-mail: shereen.zorba@unep.org