



**Intergovernmental Science-Policy
Platform on Biodiversity and
Ecosystem Services**

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**Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy
Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services**

Fourth session

Kuala Lumpur, 22–28 February 2016

Item 7 of the provisional agenda*

**Implementation of the conflict of interest policy for the
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and
Ecosystem Services**

Note by the secretariat

The Plenary at its third session adopted in its decision IPBES-3/3 the conflict of interest policy and implementation procedures set out in annex II to that decision. The annex to the present note provides information prepared by the secretariat to inform the Plenary on progress in implementation of the conflict of interest policy. The appendix to the annex sets out a report to the Plenary by the Committee on Conflicts of Interest on its activities, which the Committee submits in accordance with rule 10 of the implementation procedures. The annex, including its appendix, is presented without formal editing.

* IPBES/4/1.

Annex

Composition of the Committee on Conflicts of Interest

1. A Committee on conflicts of interest was established in accordance with Rule 10 of the conflict of interest policy. It is chaired by Robert Watson (Bureau vice-chair for Western European and Others Group) and is composed of the following 9 members:

- (a) 3 Bureau members:

Robert Watson (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland); Committee Chair

Alfred Oteng-Yeboah (Ghana)

Leonel Sierralta (Chile)

- (b) 5 members, one per UN region:

Helena Nader (Brazil)

Kevin Joseph Cash (Canada)

Haigen Xu (China)

Kaouthar Tliche Aloui (Tunisia)

Nilay (Çabuk) Kaya (Turkey)

- (a) 1 legal counsel

Masa Nagai, Deputy Director, Division of Environmental Law and Conventions, UNEP, is serving as the “additional member with appropriate legal expertise from, and appointed by the organization hosting the secretariat” (Rule 10).

Actions taken

2. The secretariat convened a teleconference with the chair of the Committee on 22 June 2015, in order to initiate the work of the Committee. At this teleconference, it was agreed that:

(a) Experts would be invited by the Secretariat to submit the disclosure forms electronically through an online disclosure form (appendix to annex II to decision IPBES-3/3).

- (b) The following complements were proposed for the disclosure form:

(i) Current employer (singular) was replaced with current employers (plural);

(ii) A note on question 2 was provided to request experts to list all current sources of funding for research and consultancies in their response to question 2 of the form.

3. The secretariat convened a teleconference of the Committee on conflicts of interest on 15 July 2015, and adopted a workflow and procedures for receiving and reviewing disclosure forms as follows:

(a) Committee members would receive a summary spreadsheet of all submissions and would comment on whether they identified any conflict;

- (b) Each form would be reviewed by 2 members of the Committee;

(c) Bureau and MEP forms would be reviewed by the 5 non Bureau Committee members;

(d) A teleconference of the Committee would be held to discuss cases where “possible conflicts” had been flagged by 1 or the 2 Committee members.

4. The secretariat invited the Bureau, MEP, technical support unit’s professional staff and all experts to submit disclosure forms. Experts were required to submit a disclosure form for each deliverable they are involved in, in situations where they contribute to several deliverables.

5. The secretariat convened a teleconference of the Committee on 18 December 2015 to review submissions received, which corresponded at that time to about 87% of the expected disclosure forms. The

committee, following that teleconference, produced the report below, which represents the report to the Plenary of the Committee.

6. The secretariat will actively seek to receive the remainder of the forms. On 7 January 2016, 95% of the forms had been received, and additional forms submitted to the Committee for their review.

7. Following the teleconference held on 18 December 2015, the Committee sent to the Secretariat the letter set out in the appendix below for submission to the Plenary. The letter constitutes the Committee's report on its activities and is being submitted to the Plenary pursuant to rule 10, paragraph 5, of the conflict of interest policy, according to which the Committee will submit a report on its activities to the Plenary at least four weeks prior to each session of the Plenary.

Appendix

Report of the Committee on Conflicts of Interest to the Plenary on its activities

Dear Governments and Observers

The Conflicts of interest committee has reviewed all conflict of interest forms submitted to date (December 17, 2015), i.e., 747 submissions.

When examining an individual's Conflict of interest (COI) form, the Committee spent considerable time differentiating between "biases" and "conflict of interest". The IPBES Plenary (Annex II of Decision IPBES-3/3) defined a conflict of interest as any current interest of an individual that could either: (i) significantly impair the individual's objectivity in carrying out his or her duties and responsibilities for the Platform, or (ii) create an unfair advantage for any person or organization. Whereas bias, as defined in the IPBES policy on COI, refers to a point of view or perspective that is strongly held by an individual regarding a particular issue or set of issues.

The strength of IPBES is to ensure that the experts involved in preparing the assessment reports (co-chairs, coordinating lead authors, lead authors and review editors) represent a wide range of experiences, views and perspectives. The Committee recognized that all experts, whether from academia, government, private sector or NGOs, have biases. This is part of human nature. As noted in the COI policy, bias is managed through the selection of experts with a balance of perspectives, and through the peer review process.

The Committee reviewed all forms and paid particular attention to a small number of cases where the expert indicated they worked for a private sector company involved in the production of pesticides or an NGO which advocated for certain "green policies".

The Committee did not find any conflicts of interests as defined in Annex II of Decision IPBES-3/3.

The Committee noted that as of December 17, 2015 the secretariat had received 747 out of a possible 858 COI forms. Given that the COI policy requires all experts to be involved in IPBES activities to submit a COI form, the Committee exhorts the secretariat to remind all experts that a condition of being involved in an IPBES activity is submission of a COI form, otherwise their participation will not be permitted and their involvement terminated.

Robert T. Watson
Chair of the Committee on conflict of interest
On behalf of the Committee