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

Online, 14–24 June 2021

Item 5 of the provisional agenda\*

**Report of the Executive Secretary on progress in the  
implementation of the rolling work programme up to 2030****Implementation of the conflict-of-interest policy for the  
Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and  
Ecosystem Services**

In its decision IPBES-3/3, on procedures for the preparation of Platform deliverables, the Plenary of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services adopted the conflict-of-interest policy and implementation procedures set out in annex II to that decision. The annex to the present note, which is presented without formal editing, provides information on the progress made in implementing the policy, along with a report to the Plenary by the Committee on Conflicts of Interest on its activities, which the Committee submitted in accordance with rule 10 of the implementation procedures.

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\* IPBES/8/1.

## Annex

### I. Composition of the Committee on Conflicts of Interest

1. A Committee on Conflicts of Interest was established in 2015, following the third session of the Plenary, in accordance with rule 10 of the conflict-of-interest policy and implementation procedures, and comprised Robert Watson (at that time IPBES vice-chair for the Western Europe and Others Group, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland), Alfred Oteng-Yeboah (at that time IPBES vice-chair for the African Group, Ghana), Leonel Serralta (at that time vice-chair for the Latin American and the Caribbean Group, Chile), as well as Tliche Aloui (Tunisia), Haigen Xu (China), Nilay Kaya (Turkey), Helena Nader (Brazil), Kevin Joseph Cash (Canada) as well as the legal advisor to the IPBES secretariat from the United Nations Environment Programme.
2. Following elections for membership of the Bureau at the fourth session of the Plenary, Robert Watson (at that time Chair of IPBES,) stepped down from the Committee, and Alfred Oteng-Yeboah became Chair of the Committee. After the fifth session of the Plenary, Committee member Kevin Joseph Cash resigned and following a call for nominations in January 2018 for candidates from the Western Europe and Others Group, with a deadline of 2 February 2018 was replaced by Jean-François Silvain, from France. Following the resignation from Diego Pacheco as member of the Bureau before the sixth session of the Plenary, the Bureau, at its 11<sup>th</sup> meeting, selected Ana Maria Hernandez (Colombia) as third member of the Bureau serving as member of the Committee.
3. Following election for membership of the Bureau at the seventh session of the Plenary, Ana Maria Hernandez (Chair of IPBES) stepped down from the Committee, and Prudence Galega (at that time IPBES vice-chair for the African Group, Cameroon), became Chair of the Committee. The Bureau selected Vinod Mathur (India) as third member of the Bureau serving as member of the Committee. Upon resignation of Prudence Galega from the Bureau in October 2019, Rashad Allahverdiyev was appointed Chair ad interim by the Bureau. The Bureau, at its 14<sup>th</sup> meeting in January 2020, elected Douglas Beard (IPBES vice-chair for the Western Europe and Others Group) to serve as chair of committee.
4. The Bureau decided, also at its 14<sup>th</sup> meeting, to hold elections for membership of the committee at its 15<sup>th</sup> meeting in September 2020. Notification [EM/2020/16](#), in which the Bureau invited IPBES members to nominate candidates for election to the IPBES Committee on Conflicts of Interest, was issued on 15 June 2020, with a deadline for nominations of 10 August 2020. At its 15<sup>th</sup> meeting in September 2020, the Bureau selected one candidate from each of the five UN regions to serve for a period of three years, until the election of their successors. In March 2021, the member from the Asia-Pacific region resigned and a call for nominations for that region will be issued shortly.
5. The Committee is currently composed of the following members:
  - 3 Bureau members:
    - Douglas Beard (United States of America), Chair
    - Vinod Mathur (India)
    - Rashad Allahverdiyev (Azerbaijan)
  - 5 members, one per UN region:
    - George Owusu Essegbey (Ghana)
    - Alla Aleksanyan (Armenia)
    - Raúl Gutiérrez Patiño (Mexico)
    - Maria Alexandra Aragão (Portugal)
    - Vacant* (Asia-Pacific)
  - 1 legal counsel:
    - Stadler Trengove, Principal Legal Officer, Law Division, UNEP, serving as the “additional member with appropriate legal expertise from, and appointed by, the organization hosting the secretariat” (rule 10).

## **II. Action by the Committee**

### **A. Overview of declaration forms reviewed since the seventh session of the IPBES Plenary**

6. Since the seventh session of the Plenary, the Committee has reviewed the disclosure forms of:
  - Additional experts and fellows of the assessment of invasive alien species;
  - Additional experts of the assessment of the sustainable use of wild species;
  - Additional experts of the values assessment;
  - Additional members of technical support units;
  - Members of the task force on capacity-building;
  - Members of the task force on indigenous and local knowledge;
  - Members of the task force on knowledge and data;
  - Members of the task force on policy tools and methodologies;
  - Members and fellows of the task force on scenarios and models;
  - Experts to assist in the scoping of the nexus assessment;
  - Experts to assist in the scoping of the transformative change assessment;
  - Experts to participate in the IPBES workshop on biodiversity and pandemics;
  - Experts to participate in the workshop on biodiversity and climate change co-sponsored by IPBES and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;
  - Nominees for experts to assist with the scoping of the business and biodiversity assessment.
7. All experts applying for nomination as an IPBES expert were required to complete electronically a declaration form on relevant interests, which is set out in the appendix to annex II to decision IPBES-3/3 as part of the IPBES conflict-of-interest policy and implementation procedures. For each selection process, the secretariat compiled the information received through the declaration forms and submitted the compilation to the Committee for its review with regard to any potential conflict.
8. The Committee reviewed the compiled information and had access to the disclosure forms, which on 21 May 2021 corresponded to all the selected experts and members of technical support units with the exception of two authors (one from the assessment of the sustainable use of wild species and one of the assessment of invasive alien species) whose responses were delayed. No conflict was identified by the Committee with regard to the forms submitted by experts selected to participate in an IPBES deliverable and by additional members of technical support units.

### **B. Meetings and deliberations of the Committee**

9. On 4 December 2019, the interim Chair of the Committee convened a meeting by teleconference to take stock of the work of the Committee. Following this meeting, considering that elections for membership of the Committee had been held in 2015, it was recommended to the Bureau at its 14<sup>th</sup> meeting to conduct elections at its 15<sup>th</sup> meeting.
10. Following elections for the membership of the Committee at the 15<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bureau in September 2020, an online meeting of the Committee was held on 16 November 2020 to welcome Committee members and introduce the IPBES conflict-of-interest policy and implementation procedures as well as the role of the Committee.
11. On 10 and 25 February 2021, the Committee met online to discuss the declaration forms of nominees for experts to assist with the scoping of the business and biodiversity assessment.
12. 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 for information, 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 Committee on Conflicts of interest reviewed all conflict of interest forms submitted to date (10 May 2021), since the seventh session of the Plenary. The Committee found no indication of a conflict of interest as defined in annex II of decision IPBES-3/3 in the forms submitted by individuals selected for an IPBES role.

The newly constituted Committee discussed, in particular, the declaration forms of the nominees for experts to assist with the scoping of the business and biodiversity assessment ahead of the selection of experts by the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel. Of the 156 nominations received, 10 candidates had declared relevant activities or interests that might be considered as constituting a potential conflict of interest and the Committee requested further information on these interests.

When considering the information received, the Committee recalled the differentiation between “bias” and “conflict of interest”. The IPBES Plenary, in the IPBES policy on conflicts of interest, set out in annex II to 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 conflict of interest, refers to a point of view or perspective that is strongly held by an individual regarding a particular issue or set of issues.

The Committee also recalled its earlier consideration, that as one of its strengths IPBES ensures that the experts involved in a deliverable represent a wide range of experiences, visions and perspectives; and that it is normal that every expert, whether from academia, government, private sector or non-governmental organizations, has points of view or perspectives that are strongly held, as that is part of human nature. The Committee also recalled that according to the conflict of interest policy, bias is managed with a strategy, based on two pillars: through the transparent selection of experts representing a balance of perspectives, and through peer review processes.

Therefore, the Committee concluded with regard to experts assisting with the scoping of the business and biodiversity assessment that affiliation with the private sector does not per se constitute a conflict of interest; neither does belonging to governmental or other organizations. Rather, the Committee highlighted that the group of experts to assist with the scoping would be comprised of experts and practitioners with outstanding expertise related to the impact and dependency of different economic sectors on biodiversity and nature’s contributions to people and come consequently from a diversity of backgrounds in order to bring to the scoping process a diversity of relevant expertise domains to make the assessment as scientifically credible, independent and relevant to policymakers and business as possible.

The Committee also highlighted that experts were selected to exercise their mission in their individual expert capacity and not to represent the views of any public or private organization. Experts selected by the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel were asked to endorse a public statement confirming that they comply with this requirement.

The Committee decided to further consider the need for additional action in the context of the selection of experts to conduct the assessment of business and biodiversity, once approved by the Plenary following the scoping process.

Douglas Beard

Chair of the Committee on Conflict of Interest

On behalf of the Committee

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