

Conflict of interest policy and implementation procedures

The conflict of interest policy and implementation procedures have been adopted by the Plenary in decision IPBES-3/3 and are contained in Annex II to this decision.

I. Conflict of interest policy

A. Purpose of the policy

1. The objective of the Platform as stated in paragraph 1 of the “Functions, operating principles and institutional arrangements of the Platform”¹ is to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being and sustainable development. According to the operating principles of the Platform, in carrying out its work the Platform must be scientifically independent and ensure credibility, relevance and legitimacy through peer review of its work and transparency in its decision-making processes and 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.

2. The role of the Platform requires that it pay special attention to issues of independence and bias in order to maintain the integrity of, and public confidence in, its products and processes. It is essential that the work of the Platform not be compromised by any conflict of interest on the part of those who execute it.

3. The overall purpose of this policy is to protect the legitimacy, integrity and credibility of the Platform and its deliverables as well as confidence in its activities and in individuals who are directly involved in the preparation of its reports and other deliverables. The policy is based on principles and does not provide an exhaustive list of criteria for the identification of conflicts of interest. The Platform recognizes the commitment and dedication of those who participate in its activities and the need to maintain a balance between minimizing the reporting burden and ensuring the integrity of the Platform and its deliverables while continuing to build and maintain public trust.

4. The conflict of interest policy is designed to ensure that potential conflicts of interest (see sect. C below) are identified, communicated to the Committee on Conflicts of Interest and managed in order to avoid any adverse impact on the Platform’s independence, deliverables and processes, thereby protecting the person or persons concerned, the Platform and the public interest. Any duly reasoned request relating to a potential conflict of interest may be sent to the Bureau² of the Platform.

5. It is essential to avoid a situation in which a reasonable person could question, discount or dismiss the work of the Platform owing to the perception of a conflict of interest. It is recognized that the privacy and professional reputation of individuals must be respected. Identifying a potential conflict of interest does not automatically mean that a conflict of interest exists. The policy is intended to enable individuals to provide the information necessary for the evaluation of a given situation.

6. At its first session, held in Bonn, Germany, in January 2013, the Plenary of the Platform requested the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel to develop its own code of practice for the performance of its scientific and technical functions. This code of practice was duly developed and at the first joint meeting of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Bureau, held in Bergen, Norway, in June 2013, the Bureau reviewed and revised the code of practice with a view to adopting it.

B. Scope of the policy

7. This policy applies to the senior leadership of the Platform, namely, members of the Bureau, the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and any other subsidiary bodies contributing to the development of deliverables, authors with responsibility for report content (including report co-chairs, coordinating lead authors and lead authors), review editors and the professional staff to be hired to work in a technical support unit established by the Platform.

¹ UNEP/IPBES.MI/2/9, annex I, appendix I.

² bureau@ipbes.net.

8. The professional staff members of the secretariat are employees of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and are subject to the Programme's disclosure and ethics policies, which include conflicts of interest. Likewise, the professional staff of any technical support unit who are employees of a United Nations entity are subject to the conflict of interest policy of that entity. Technical support units that are not hosted by the United Nations are expected to comply with the Platform's policy.

9. The policy applies to the development of any and all deliverables of the Platform.

10. The application of the conflict of interest policy to persons elected to or selected for positions in the Platform should reflect their specific responsibilities.

C. Definition of "conflict of interest" and "bias"

11. For the purposes of this policy, any circumstances that could lead a reasonable person to question either an individual's objectivity, or whether an unfair advantage has been created, constitute a potential conflict of interest. A "conflict of interest" refers to any current interest of an individual that could:

(a) Significantly impair the individual's objectivity in carrying out his or her duties and responsibilities for the Platform;

(b) Create an unfair advantage for any person or organization.

12. A distinction is made between "conflict of interest" and "bias". "Bias" refers to a point of view or perspective that is strongly held regarding a particular issue or set of issues. In the case of author and review teams, bias can and should be managed through the selection of authors and reviewers with a balance of perspectives. It is expected that the Platform's author teams will include individuals with different perspectives and affiliations. Individuals or teams of individuals involved in selecting authors should strive for an author team composition that reflects a balance of expertise and perspectives to ensure that the Platform's products are comprehensive and objective and remain neutral with respect to policy. In selecting these individuals, care must be taken to ensure that biases can be balanced, where they exist. In contrast, a "conflict of interest" refers to a situation as described in paragraph 11. Holding a view that one believes to be correct, but that one does not stand to gain from personally, does not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest but may be a bias.

13. The conflict of interest requirements in this policy are not designed to include an assessment of an individual's behaviour or character or his or her ability to act objectively despite the conflict of interest.

14. This policy applies only to current conflicts of interest and does not apply to past interests that have expired. Professional and other non-financial interests need only be disclosed on the conflict of interest form if they are significant and relevant. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to contact the secretariat, which, in turn, will seek advice from the Committee on Conflicts of Interest. Significant and relevant interests may include, but are not limited to, membership of advisory committees associated with private sector organizations and of the boards of non-profit or advocacy groups. Such associations do not necessarily constitute a conflict of interest, however.

15. Financial interests need only be disclosed on the conflict of interest form if they are significant and relevant. Such interests may include, but are not limited to, employment relationships, consulting relationships, financial investments, intellectual property interests, commercial interests and sources of research support. Individuals should also disclose the significant and relevant financial interests of any person with whom the individual has a substantial business or relevant shared interest, such as a close family member. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to contact the secretariat, which, in turn, will seek advice from the Committee on Conflicts of Interest.

16. In order to prevent situations in which a conflict of interest may arise, individuals directly involved in or leading the preparation of deliverables of the Platform should avoid being in a position in which they are required to approve, adopt or accept on behalf of any Government the text that he or she was directly involved in drafting.

II. Implementation procedures

Rule 1

These implementation procedures are designed to ensure that relevant interests are identified and then disclosed to the Committee on Conflicts of Interest, which will identify potential and real conflicts of interest and manage them in order to avoid any adverse impact on the Platform and its deliverables while protecting the person or persons concerned and the public interest.

Rule 2

1. These implementation procedures apply to all conflicts of interest as defined in section C of the conflict of interest policy and apply to the individuals listed in section B on the scope of the policy.
2. Compliance with the conflict of interest policy and implementation procedures is mandatory. An individual will not be permitted to participate in the work of the Platform if he or she has not complied with the policy and procedures. If a conflict of interest is identified, a person may only proceed to participate in the activities of the Platform if action is taken that resolves the conflict.

Members of the Bureau of the Platform and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel: review process prior to appointment

Rule 3

1. The conflict of interest disclosure form contained in the appendix to the present procedures will be submitted to the secretariat in respect of each nominee for election to the Bureau of the Platform and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel.
2. A Committee on Conflicts of Interest (see rule 10) will review the conflict of interest forms and may request additional information and advice as appropriate. If the Committee determines that a nominee for membership on the Bureau or the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved, the nominee will not be eligible for election to the Bureau or the Panel. The nominee may request a review, however (see rule 8).
3. The process described in this rule will also apply to candidates for election to the Bureau of the Platform who are nominated during the course of the Platform session at which the relevant election is due to be held. In such cases, candidates will be required to complete the form, which will be reviewed by the Committee prior to the election.

Members of the Bureau of the Platform and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel: review process after appointment

Rule 4

1. All members of the Bureau of the Platform and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel will inform the secretariat of any changes in the information provided in their previously submitted conflict of interest disclosure forms as they arise.
2. The Committee on Conflicts of Interest will review the updated information and determine whether the relevant individual has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved, in which case the individual will no longer be eligible to be a member of the Bureau or the Panel.

Task force and expert group members, report co-chairs, coordinating lead authors, lead authors, review editors and technical support units: review process prior to appointment

Rule 5

Before an individual is appointed as a task force or expert group member, report co-chair, coordinating lead author, lead author or review editor, the secretariat will request the individual to complete a conflict of interest form for submission to the secretariat. The Committee on Conflicts of Interest will then evaluate the form to determine whether the individual may be affected by a potential conflict of interest that cannot be resolved. If the Committee determines that the individual has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved, the individual will not be eligible to participate in the preparation of the deliverable. The individual may, however, request a review (see rule 8).

Rule 6

Candidates applying for professional posts in any technical support unit established by the Platform in an organization outside the United Nations system should, prior to their appointment, submit a conflict of interest form to the secretariat for evaluation within five working days by the Committee on Conflicts of Interest in accordance with rule 8.

Task force and expert group members, report co-chairs, coordinating lead authors, lead authors, review editors and technical support units: review process after appointment

Rule 7

All task force and expert group members, report co-chairs, coordinating lead authors, lead authors and review editors will inform the secretariat of any changes in relevant information as they arise. The professional staff of any technical support unit established by the Platform in an organization outside the United Nations system will inform the secretariat of any changes in relevant information as they arise. The Committee on Conflicts of Interest will evaluate the revised information in accordance with the procedure for reviewing conflict of interest issues prior to appointment.

Principles for considering conflict of interest issues

Rule 8

1. The bodies involved in advising and deciding on conflict of interest issues in respect of individuals under the conflict of interest policy (the Committee on Conflicts of Interest and the Bureau) will consult the individual affected if it has concerns about a potential conflict of interest and/or requires clarification of any matter arising out of a conflict of interest disclosure form. They will ensure that the individual affected and, as appropriate, the Platform member who nominated the individual, are afforded the opportunity to discuss any concerns about a potential conflict of interest.
2. If the Committee on Conflicts of Interest determines that an individual has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved, the relevant individual may request a review by the Bureau of the Platform of the Committee's determination. The individual concerned will be bound by the determination of the Committee pending the outcome of the review. The Bureau will review the determination at its next meeting and its decision will be binding.
3. When considering whether an individual has a conflict of interest, the relevant body will, in consultation with the individual, explore options for resolving the conflict.³
4. If it is determined that an individual has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved the individual will no longer be able to participate in the preparation of the Platform deliverable.
5. Members of bodies that are involved in considering conflict of interest issues may not consider cases involving themselves and will recuse themselves in the event that the relevant body considers a potential conflict of interest that concerns them.

Processing and storage of information

Rule 9

1. All conflict of interest forms will be submitted to the secretariat, which will securely archive such forms, together with any records of the deliberations and/or decisions of the Committee on Conflicts of Interest, and retain them for a period of five years after the end of the individual's participation in the role that required the review, after which such information will be destroyed.
2. Subject to the requirement to notify the existence of a conflict of interest to others under rule 8, the forms referred to in this rule will be considered confidential and will not be disclosed or used for any purpose other than the consideration of conflict of interest issues under these implementation procedures without the express consent of the individual providing the information and a decision of the Bureau.

³ Individuals might, for example, resolve a conflict of interest by divesting themselves of the particular financial or other interest that gave rise to the potential conflict or by recusing themselves from discussions or decision-making processes in respect of which they have a conflict.

Committee on Conflicts of Interest

Rule 10

1. A Committee on Conflicts of Interest (“the Committee”) will be established for the purpose of implementing these rules and determining conflict of interest cases referred to it by the Bureau of the Platform.
2. The Committee on Conflicts of Interest will meet by teleconference as necessary. If a physical meeting is needed, it will be held before or after regular Bureau meetings.
3. The Committee will comprise three elected members from the Bureau, including one of the Bureau vice-chairs as chair, and five members, one per United Nations region, selected by the Bureau following a call for nominees from member countries of the Platform, together with one additional member with appropriate legal expertise from, and appointed by, the organization hosting the secretariat.
4. The members of the Committee are expected to reach consensus on conflict of interest issues. If consensus cannot be reached, exceptionally, on matters of particular urgency, the chair of the Committee may take a final decision with due regard to the weight of opinion expressed in the Committee. The Committee will decide upon its method of working.
5. The Committee will submit a report on its activities to the Plenary of the Platform at least four weeks prior to each session of the Plenary. Issues of confidentiality will be addressed by the Committee at the earliest opportunity.

Appendix Conflict of interest disclosure form

Confidential

Conflict of interest disclosure

Please sign and date the last page of this form and return it to the Executive Secretary of the Platform. Kindly retain a copy for your records.

Disclosure of relevant interests form

Note: You have been invited to serve on the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services because of your professional standing and expertise. As outlined in the Platform's conflict of interest policy, the role of the Platform demands that it pay special attention to issues of conflict of interest and bias in order to maintain the integrity of, and public confidence in, its deliverables and processes. It is essential that the work of the Platform not be compromised by any conflict of interest affecting individuals who execute it. Disclosure of certain matters is necessary, therefore, to ensure that the work of the Platform is not compromised by conflicts of interest. We are reliant on your professionalism, common sense and honesty in filling out this form.

The Platform does not require comprehensive lists of activities under each heading set out below. You should disclose interests that are significant and relevant and relate or have the appearance of relating to your duties within the Platform and that could:

- (i) Significantly impair your objectivity in carrying out your duties and responsibilities for the Platform;
- (ii) Create an unfair advantage for you or any person or organization and which could result in you securing a direct and material gain through outcomes in a Platform product.

For the purposes of this policy, circumstances that could lead a reasonable person to question your objectivity, or whether an unfair advantage has been created, constitute a potential conflict of interest and should be disclosed on this form. Disclosure of an interest on this form does not automatically mean that a conflict exists or that you will be unable to perform your designated role in the Platform. If you are in any doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, you are encouraged to disclose such interest.

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____ EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

CURRENT EMPLOYER: _____

ROLE IN PLATFORM: _____

(1) Are you involved in any significant and relevant professional activities that might be considered as constituting a conflict of interest?

___ Yes ___ No (if yes, please give details below).

Please list significant and relevant professional and other non-financial interests that relate or may have the appearance of relating to your duties for the Platform and could be interpreted as:

- (i) Significantly impairing your objectivity in carrying out your duties and responsibilities for the Platform;
- (ii) Creating an unfair advantage for you or any person or organization. This might include, but is not limited to, membership on the boards of advocacy groups.

(2) Do you have any significant and relevant financial interests in the subject matter of the work in which you will be involved that might be considered as constituting a conflict of interest?

___ Yes ___ No (if yes, please give details below).

Please list significant and relevant financial interests that relate or may have the appearance of relating to your duties for the Platform and could be interpreted as:

- (i) Significantly impairing your objectivity in carrying out your duties and responsibilities for the Platform;
- (ii) Creating an unfair advantage for you or any person or organization. These may include employment relationships, consulting relationships, financial investments, intellectual property interests and commercial interests and sources of private-sector research support.

(3) Is there any other interest that could affect your objectivity or independence in the work in which you will be involved?

___ Yes ___ No (if yes, please give details below).

I hereby declare to the best of my knowledge that the disclosed information is complete and correct. I undertake to inform the secretariat of the Platform immediately of any change in my circumstances during the course of the work assigned to me.

I understand that information about my interests will be held by the Platform for a period of five years after the end of the activity to which I contributed, after which the information will be destroyed. Subject to the requirement to notify the existence of a conflict of interest to others under rule 8 of the implementation procedures, I understand that these forms will be considered confidential and will be reviewed in accordance with the conflict of interest implementation procedures.

I hereby declare that I will comply with the Platform’s conflict of interest policy and implementation procedures.

Signature

Date

Further details (if answered “yes” to any of the questions 1–3 above):
