



**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**

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Item 7 (e) of the provisional agenda*

**Rules and procedures for the operation of the Platform:
conflict of interest policy**

Draft conflict of interest policy and procedures

Note by the secretariat

The annex to the present note sets out the draft conflict of interest policy and procedures for the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services as presented to the Plenary at its second session and revised by the Co-Chairs of the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel and the Bureau taking on board the comments made. The draft conflict of interest policy and procedures was used recently by the authors of the thematic assessment on pollinators, pollination and food production and the methodological assessment on scenario analysis and modelling of biodiversity and ecosystem services. In both cases, the feedback from the Co-Chairs of the assessments was positive. The Plenary at its second session decided that it would resume consideration of the draft conflict of interest policy and procedures at its third session.

* IPBES/3/1.

Annex

Draft conflict of interest policy and procedures

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 is not compromised by any conflict of interest for those who execute it.

3. The overall purpose of this policy is to protect the legitimacy, integrity and credibility of the Platform as well as confidence in its activities and in individuals who are directly involved in the preparation of 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. It seeks to encourage broad participation in its work, ensuring that its representativeness and geographical balance are not impaired whilst continuing to build and maintain public trust.

4. The conflict of interest policy is designed to ensure that potential conflicts of interest are identified, communicated to the relevant parties and managed in order to avoid any adverse impact on the Platform’s independence, products and processes, thereby protecting the person or persons concerned, the Platform and the public interest. 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 existence of a conflict of interest.

5. 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 in order to perform 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 established by the Platform, authors with responsibility for report content (coordinating lead authors, lead authors), review editors and the professional staff of any technical support units established by the Platform.

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 which are not hosted by the United Nations are expected to comply with the current policy.

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

9. The policy will take into account the various roles, responsibilities and levels of authority of participants in the Platform with particular focus on whether responsibility is held at an individual level or shared by a team and the level of influence of individuals on the content of the Platform's products.
10. The policy applies to the development of any and all products of the Platform, including but not limited to: assessment reports, special reports, methodology reports and technical papers.
11. 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”

12. A “conflict of interest” refers to any current professional, financial or other interest which could:

- (a) Significantly impair an 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.

For the purposes of this policy, the 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. Such potential conflicts are subject to disclosure.

13. 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 authors, care must be taken to ensure that biases can be balanced, where they exist. In contrast, a “conflict of interest” refers to a situation in which an individual could secure a direct and material gain as a result of involvement in the Platform. Holding a view that one believes to be correct, but that one does not stand to gain from personally, does not constitute a conflict of interest.

14. 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.

15. This policy applies only to current conflicts of interest. It does not apply to past interests that have expired, no longer exist and cannot reasonably affect current behaviour, nor does it apply to possible interests that do not exist at present but may arise in the future as such interests are inherently speculative and uncertain.

16. Professional and other non-financial interests need only be disclosed if they are significant and relevant. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to seek advice from the secretariat, which, in turn, will seek advice from the appropriate Platform body as defined in section II, on implementation procedures, of this policy. 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.

17. Financial interests need only be disclosed 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. If in doubt about whether an interest should be disclosed, individuals are encouraged to seek advice from the secretariat, which, in turn, will seek advice from the appropriate Platform body as defined in section II, on implementation procedures, of this policy.

18. In order to prevent situations in which a conflict of interest may arise, individuals directly involved in or leading the preparation of reports or other products 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 conflicts of interest are identified, communicated to the relevant parties and managed in order to avoid any adverse impact on the Platform's independence, products and processes, thereby protecting the person or persons concerned, the Platform 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 may not 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 or the individual is a Platform author subject to the provisions set out in rule 6 of these procedures.

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 this document 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 (refer to rule 11) on Conflicts of Interest 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 of the Bureau or the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved, the individual will not be eligible for election to the Bureau or the Panel.

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 annually of any changes in the information provided in their previously submitted conflict of interest disclosure form.

2. The Committee on Conflicts of Interest will review the updated information and determine whether the relevant Platform member has a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved and what further action is necessary in accordance with the conflict of interest policy. The Committee may seek further information or advice as appropriate.

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 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. With the support of the secretariat, the Committee on Conflicts of Interest will then evaluate the form to determine whether the individual may be affected by a conflict of interest that cannot be resolved.

Rule 6

In exceptional circumstances, a conflict of interest affecting a Platform author that cannot be resolved may be tolerated if the individual is deemed to be making a unique contribution to a Platform product and if it is determined that the conflict can be managed to avoid any adverse impact on the relevant

Platform product. In such cases, the Committee on Conflicts of Interest will publicly disclose the conflict of interest and the reasons for determining that the individual may continue to contribute to the Platform's work in spite thereof.

Rule 7

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.

Coordinating lead authors, lead authors, review editors and technical support units: review process after appointment

Rule 8

All coordinating lead authors, lead authors and review editors shall inform the secretariat annually 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 shall inform the secretariat of any changes in relevant information as they arise. With the support of the secretariat, 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 9

1. Any of the bodies involved in advising and deciding on conflict of interest issues in respect of individuals under the conflict of interest policy should 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. It should 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 Bureau shall review the determination at the session that immediately follows the request. The individual concerned will be bound by the determination of the Committee pending the outcome of the review.
3. When considering whether an individual has a conflict of interest, the relevant body shall, in consultation with the individual, explore options for resolving the conflict.²
4. Members of bodies that are involved in considering conflict of interest issues may not consider cases involving themselves and shall recuse themselves in the event that the relevant body considers a potential conflict of interest that concerns them.

Processing and storage of information

Rule 10

1. All conflict of interest forms in respect of Platform participants 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 activity to which the relevant individual contributed, 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 9, the information referred to in this rule will be considered confidential and will not be 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.

² 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 11

1. A Committee on Conflicts of Interest (“the Committee”) will be established for the purpose of:
 - (a) Determining whether members of the Bureau of the Platform and the Multidisciplinary Expert Panel are affected by any conflicts of interest;
 - (b) Determining conflict of interest cases referred to it by individuals or bodies participating in the Platform;
 - (c) 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.
2. The Committee will comprise one elected member of the Bureau from each region and one additional member with appropriate legal expertise from, and appointed by, the organization hosting the secretariat.
3. The Committee will elect a chair at its first meeting.
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 shall 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 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 is not 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 current interests that are significant and relevant to your role 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 in this form. Disclosure of an interest on this form does not automatically mean that a conflict situation 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 information.

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 current, significant and relevant professional and other non-financial interests which 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 current, significant and relevant financial interests which 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.

Note: Typically, financial interests under \$10,000 would not be considered significant.

(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 Secretary 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 9 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):
