

## Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Wednesday, 23 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Wednesday, with a joint plenary session and a SBSTTA plenary meeting in the morning. The joint plenary took stock of progress and coordinated work among the three bodies. SBSTTA addressed invasive alien species (IAS), and marine and coastal biodiversity.

In the afternoon, a contact group under the Working Group on the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (WG2020) began its deliberations on digital sequence information (DSI) on the basis of a non-paper developed by the co-leads. In the evening, a SBSTTA contact group focused on monitoring for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF) and an SBI contact group addressed the financial mechanism.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the joint plenary, the SBSTTA plenary, the WG2020 contact group on DSI as well as the discussions of the two contact groups that met in the evening on Tuesday, 22 March. The remaining two contact groups will be summarized in the Bulletin on Thursday, 24 March.

### Joint Plenary

Zhou Guomei, Deputy Secretary General, China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED), on behalf of COP President Huang Runqiu, Minister of Ecology and Environment, China, opened the session. She invited the subsidiary bodies' Chairs and the Co-Chairs of the WG2020 to provide updates.

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) and SBI Chair Charlotta Sörqvist (Sweden) outlined progress in the subsidiary bodies, both in plenary sessions and in the contact group meetings. They addressed remaining work, including establishing informal groups for further consideration of controversial items where progress is needed.

WG2020 Co-Chair Francis Ogwal (Uganda) provided an update on the work of WG2020, including work in two plenary sessions and under five contact groups, which address different parts of the GBF. He commended the work of delegates and of the contact groups' Co-Leads, noting that progress has been slower than required to conclude work on time. He urged increased focus and efficiency.

WG2020 Co-Chair Basile van Havre (Canada) discussed the linkages between the three bodies, offering a graphic representation of agenda items considered under the subsidiary bodies that feed into the GBF. SBSTTA Chair Benítez Díaz and SBI Chair Sörqvist offered their insights on the interlinkages.

Guomei urged delegates to keep interventions as focused as possible, strive for consensus, and deliver a concise and

communicable GBF. She closed the session by stressing that "great choices are always simple."

### SBSTTA-24 Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Benítez Díaz opened the session by inviting reports from contact groups' Co-Chairs.

On health and biodiversity, Co-Chair Helena Brown (Jamaica) reported that it will be challenging to complete the review of the document during this meeting. SBSTTA Chair Benítez Díaz requested an informal group to find a way forward on the controversial issues. The Co-Chairs will prepare a short draft text on procedural issues outlining future steps.

On the proposed monitoring framework, Contact Group Co-Chair Andrew Stott (UK) reported that all indicators for targets have been discussed and that results have been captured in two non-papers: a co-chairs' assessment of proposed headline indicators, and an addendum with additional indicators suggested by parties.

On marine and coastal biodiversity, Contact Group Co-Chair Marie-May Muzunguile (Seychelles) reported that many brackets remain in the document under consideration on ecologically or biologically significant marine areas (EBSAs). The Co-Chairs will prepare a revised CRP to be considered by plenary.

**Invasive alien species (IAS):** SBSTTA Chair Benítez Díaz reported that a friends of the Chair group, facilitated by Senka Barudanovic (Bosnia and Herzegovina), suggested a peer-review process, as well as an online forum, for the annexes of the CRP document, containing comments from parties on different aspects of IAS management. Parties reviewed the text of document CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.7 paragraph by paragraph.

Throughout the text, ARGENTINA requested that reference to guidelines be changed to "voluntary guidelines." CANADA suggested reference to subnational governments.

TURKEY recommended changing a reference to climate change to include "land and sea use change, overexploitation, and pollution" to align with IPBES language.

On methods for cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness analysis, TURKEY requested a reference to risk analysis on the potential consequences of IAS introduction.

Views diverged on bracketed text on "taking into account the earlier decisions of the COP, multilaterally agreed rules, and specific circumstances in different regions." FRANCE and FINLAND requested removal of brackets on earlier decisions of the COP. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION called for removing the brackets completely. PARAGUAY strongly opposed deleting reference to multilaterally agreed rules and specific regional circumstances.

On inclusion of diverse values of biodiversity when assessing costs, benefits, and prioritization of management of IAS, UK

suggested, and delegates agreed to, replacing “taking into account” with “with accordance to” rights and obligations from relevant MEAs. There was also support for proposals by: ARGENTINA to include national best practices, and delete the Socio-economic Impact Classification of Alien Taxa as an example of existing processes; and CANADA to mention IPBES ongoing assessment on IAS. BRAZIL called for deletion of the entire paragraph, which was bracketed.

On the precautionary approach when considering methods such as engineered gene drives, BRAZIL mentioned existing disagreements on this issue, calling for deletion. EGYPT said stronger language is required. MOROCCO, supported by BRAZIL, suggested deleting mention of gene drives. SWITZERLAND, supported by FRANCE and FINLAND, opposed deletion, suggesting linkages with ongoing work under the Cartagena Protocol.

Regarding monitoring effects of large-scale releases of alien translocated or captive raised populations, CANADA suggested adding sharing of knowledge and best practices, and PALESTINE called for mention of both intentional and non-intentional releases.

Delegates agreed to proposals by: CANADA to include FAO and WHO secretariats in supporting implementation of GBF targets and goals related to IAS; and ARGENTINA to include national-level implementation.

On the Bern Convention’s work on emerging and infectious diseases, ARGENTINA, opposed by ISRAEL, proposed deletion of “especially the health of wild animals and plants” when referring to scanning, monitoring, and controlling emerging infectious diseases affecting biodiversity. CANADA, opposed by ARGENTINA, suggested an additional paragraph recognizing the work of IPBES in this area.

BRAZIL, supported by ARGENTINA and PARAGUAY, objected to text proposing a single organization, namely IUCN, undertaking assessments of impacts from alien pathogens or parasites and IAS. ISRAEL and GUATEMALA supported retaining the text.

On the decision with requests to the Secretariat, delegates heard interventions by:

- SPAIN, requesting collaboration with the World Tourism Organization for joint efforts to address IAS introduction from tourism, opposed by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION;
- BRAZIL and ARGENTINA, suggesting deleting a sub-paragraph on submitting a proposal to the Economic and Social Council’s Sub-Committee of Experts on the Transport of Dangerous Goods on a globally harmonized labelling system for consignments of environmentally hazardous living organisms; and
- CANADA, suggesting that the text refer to the development of a globally harmonized and operational guidance on the use and transport of sea containers, include specific text on guidance on the cleanliness of sea containers and their cargos.

ARGENTINA, supported by BRAZIL and MOROCCO, proposed the requests to the Secretariat include support from the SBSTTA Chair. Chair Benítez Díaz suggested that this refer to the SBSTTA Bureau. Some delegates disagreed on oversight by the Bureau.

On the annexes, BRAZIL said their previous interventions are not reflected and expressed reluctance in adopting the document in its entirety. Chair Benítez Díaz said the annexes will undergo peer-review. BRAZIL called out a lack of transparency in the process.

An L document will be produced for further consideration.

**Marine and Coastal Biodiversity:** SBSTTA Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the document (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.2), noting that EBSAs are covered in a separate CRP.

In preambular paragraphs, BRAZIL, opposed by NORWAY and DENMARK, recommended referring to “the” other competent intergovernmental organizations, to restrict the scope to the CBD. JAMAICA suggested language on protecting and conserving marine biodiversity at the regional level. FRANCE, supported by DENMARK, recommended language supporting the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity, applying the precautionary principle, and using the best available science. CHINA, supported by NORWAY, put forward an addition on keeping within the jurisdictional scope of the Convention and its protocols.

CHILE recommended an additional paragraph acknowledging the importance of science for decision making. ITALY proposed recognizing marine and coastal biodiversity as “one of the key” elements of the GBF.

BRAZIL suggested modifying two paragraphs to request the Secretariat to compile submissions from parties and relevant stakeholders to be considered as potential elements for a strategic review. The paragraphs were retained as alternate paragraphs within brackets for consideration by the COP.

On a paragraph on the importance of marine and coastal biodiversity for the GBF, COLOMBIA suggested references to protecting at least 30% of global oceans; “illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing”; and recognizing the role of IPLCs in marine and coastal biodiversity.

Discussions will continue.

### ***SBSTTA Contact Group on EBSAs***

The contact group on EBSAs, co-chaired by Marie-May Muzunguile (Seychelles) and Adam van Opzeeland (New Zealand), considered document CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.4, including changes made during the first part of SBSTTA-24.

Regarding Annex I (general considerations in the modification of description of EBSAs and the description of new areas), a developing country regional group asked to replace language noting that any existing EBSA causing concerns for states in regard to sovereignty disputes shall be modified. They suggested a long explanatory paragraph, describing that no action taken on the basis of this document shall be interpreted as prejudging the position of parties in sovereignty disputes. Many delegates supported the proposed language, but one opposed, asking to maintain the initial paragraph in brackets. Some suggested the proposal be placed in a footnote rather than in the text of the annex.

Regarding Annex II (repository and information-sharing mechanism for EBSAs), delegates discussed language on what the EBSA repository and the EBSA information-sharing mechanism should contain. Delegates debated whether previous versions of EBSA descriptions should be moved from the information-sharing mechanism to the repository. Many parties opposed moving the descriptions and suggested to instead clarify that the modifications are made following a COP decision. Many delegates agreed to include a reference to Indigenous and local knowledge of IPLCs, with their FPIC, PIC, or approval and involvement.

Regarding Annex III (reasons for modification of the description of EBSAs), one party asked to include a specific reference to name changes, while others felt this is part of the overall EBSA description.

Regarding Annex IV (proponents of the modifications of EBSAs), one delegate proposed to encourage collaboration with

knowledge holders. One party, supported by some, made an overarching statement that the process for designation of EBSAs in areas within national jurisdiction cannot be the same as for areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ), noting that the latter are under the domain of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and urging consistency with the work of the Intergovernmental Conference on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ). He asked to delete all references to EBSAs in ABNJ. Another asked to bracket the references to competent international organizations. Other parties said that EBSAs in ABNJ also fall under the CBD mandate. The respective references remain bracketed.

Regarding Annex V (modifications of descriptions of EBSAs for editorial reasons), and the Secretariat disseminating a notification regarding the proposed modification, one party suggested this be done upon the initiative of, or informed by, states.

A lengthy discussion took place on Annex VI (modification of description of EBSAs). Delegates discussed whether proposals for modification of EBSA descriptions submitted to the Secretariat should be done by: states within whose jurisdiction the EBSA in question is located; or by those states affected by the modification. Delegates agreed to lift the brackets on the first formulation, while retaining them in the second.

Regarding a provision on compiling a report on the proposed modifications, delegates debated bracketed references to traditional knowledge and to seeking advice of a relevant expert advisory body mandated by the COP, which some asked to delete. Some delegates expressed preference for an alternative paragraph foreseeing that the Secretariat compile a report to be made available for the information of SBSTTA and COP and for inclusion in the repository. Both remain bracketed.

Delegates discussed language on the reasons for inclusion of the modification in the EBSA information-sharing mechanism, debating the difference between its role and the role of the repository. One party asked to delete the paragraph, while many wished to maintain it, explaining that both pathways should be open.

A revised CRP will be developed for further consideration in plenary.

### **WG2020 Contact Group 5**

Contact Group Co-Lead Gaute Voigt-Hanssen (Norway) opened the session, thanking participants for their interest in DSI, which led to a record number of interventions in plenary. He said that the exercise to develop a non-paper reflecting the discussion was “difficult but interesting.” He presented the non-paper, focusing on its structure and content, and opened the floor for initial reflections.

Many parties expressed their commitment to finding a constructive, innovative, and pragmatic solution on DSI. Many parties, including two regional groups, stressed that the non-paper is a good basis for negotiations. Others, including a regional group, were not convinced that it contains a fair reflection of the different views expressed, cautioning against prejudging the outcomes of future processes. Yet others underscored fundamentally different understanding of DSI among parties, calling for a “delicate approach, avoiding hasty conclusions.”

Some parties emphasized that certain elements could be improved to adequately capture parties’ priorities. Delegates pointed to further work on: national and international practices and standards on access to DSI in public databases; traceability;

the intrinsic relationship between DSI and genetic resources, and the relevance of traditional knowledge; resource mobilization and means of implementation; addressing technology gaps between developed and developing countries; and further elaborating policy options, including hybrid ones. Some noted with concern that only one policy option is developed in the relevant annex.

Many delegates suggested focusing on a concrete and realistic roadmap, moving forward with the multi-criteria analysis on the policy options as proposed by the relevant advisory group. Some delegates supported the proposed roadmap, with others noting that further work is needed to iron out details. Most agreed that additional discussion is needed to reach consensus on the modalities of any policy option.

Some parties expressed concern regarding the timeline for completing the work prior to COP-15.

Co-Chair Lactitia Tshitwamulomoni (South Africa) opened discussions on the non-paper on DSI.

Several delegates provided proposals for the preamble. A proposal acknowledging the importance of DSI for food security, and human and animal health, taking into account the One Health approach, generated disagreements. Many argued that the One Health is not an agreed approach or understood in the context of the Convention. One party suggested referring to “multiple approaches.” Some supported adding bioecology and sustainable development.

Some delegates noted that the inclusion of Mother Earth is not necessary in the preamble. Others disagreed, and an observer group suggested referencing “Mother Earth and the life essence infusing material.”

A suggestion to add language on recognizing that DSI on genetic resources is an intrinsic part of genetic resources was met with objections by some, who argued lack of consensus.

The proposal by one party to acknowledge sovereign rights of countries over their natural resources, recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples, received support by many. Some suggested including local communities, while others said rights of local communities are not on equal footing with those of Indigenous peoples. One observer proposed “recognizing the right of countries over their genetic resources and also recognizing rights of people.” Some supported including traditional knowledge in the paragraph, with one suggesting the formulation “recognizing rights of IPLCs including on traditional knowledge associated with genetic resources.”

Many supported recognizing that there is unequal capacity to generate and use DSI. One party proposed acknowledging the link between DSI and country of origin, with another urging for clarity on the issue.

One party urged recognizing the role of science, particularly life sciences, to provide more holistic approach to DSI. Another called for recognizing the role of all branches of science in supporting the delivery of the objectives of the Convention.

Views diverged as to whether to “take note” or “welcome” the outcomes of the meeting of the AHTEG on DSI.

One party suggested including reference to the studies conducted as input for the AHTEG, and on Nagoya Protocol Article 10 (global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism). Many requested to bracket the reference to the latter; the reference was eventually included in a separate paragraph and remained bracketed.

On a paragraph discussing taking note of information developed through informal activities on DSI, one regional group, opposed by others, recommended the deletion of reference to

“archetypes” and “hybrid options.” The party that originally proposed “archetypes” agreed to its removal. Compromise text was proposed noting the possibility to develop further options.

The paragraph on criteria for a solution on DSI in the GBF received several textual amendments.

One party proposed alternative text recognizing convergence of views on the fact that benefits from the use of DSI on genetic resources consist of non-monetary and monetary benefits, as appropriate, and should be shared in a fair and equitable way provided that agreement is found on general principles as well as on practical modalities. Many parties asked for time to consider the proposal, with one party saying it has unclear intentions. One party urged mentioning monetary benefits before non-monetary, with another cautioning against overemphasizing monetary benefits. Another party called for including the notion of access in addition to that of benefits, with another responding that benefit-sharing is not a criterion but part of the solution.

The suggestion to delete reference to “a solution on DSI in the GBF” was met with objections with a party reiterating unwillingness to accept a GBF that does not contain a solution on DSI.

Many proposed strengthening the decision language. One party suggested that a possible solution for DSI should be found on fair and equitable benefit sharing through a multilateral process. Some called for stronger language recognizing the role of IPLCs. One observer supported this, urging inclusion of “responsible” research and a human rights-based approach.

Many stressed the need to ensure that open access is not interpreted as free access, adding it should be based on regulations, standards, and conditions agreed upon by parties.

One party emphasized the need to ensure that increasing mobilization of resources remains a necessary pillar and asked to include capacity building in addition to technology transfer.

One party introduced new text regarding users of DSI informing the source country prior to accessing DSI for both commercial and non-commercial use in order to ensure better traceability. Another suggested noting that “traceability of correlation between DSI and genetic resources is conducive to the development of a DSI mechanism.”

Co-Lead Tshitwamulomoni noted that divergences remain. She suggested the formation of a Friends of the Co-Leads informal group to help resolve text, and recommended focusing on sections on the timeline and roadmap.

Parties will reconvene on Thursday, 23 March to continue the first reading, and the Friends of the Co-Leads group will hold its meeting thereafter.

### ***SBI Contact Group on Reporting, Assessment, and Review***

Co-Chairs Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica) and Andrew Stott (UK) guided the discussions, which addressed a revised non-paper. Co-Chair Guthrie said that, following initial discussions in the Contact Group, the Co-Chairs decided to restructure the text under five sections on: planning, focusing on NBSAPs and national targets/commitments; reporting, addressing national reports and indicators; review, focusing on the global stocktake and assessments; non-state actors; and means of implementation. She stressed that the content of the paper remained unchanged.

Some parties requested an overview paragraph. Co-Chair Guthrie noted that a single sentence will be added on adopting a multidimensional approach to planning, monitoring, reporting, and review, listing the five structural sections.

Co-Chair Stott invited an informal group to report back on its work on language on headline indicators. A representative of the informal group reported that delegates discussed introducing a general paragraph to address the overall monitoring and review mechanism. He said that restructuring the non-paper is helpful and that discussions in the informal group will inform relevant deliberation in the contact group.

Parties initiated discussions on a paragraph calling for organizing a high-level political segment as an element of the global review or stocktake. A party suggested inviting parties that host future COPs to include, as part of the high-level segment, a high-level review of progress towards the goals and targets of the GBF. Another opposed, noting that the idea of holding a high-level political segment on review “is not convincing,” adding that the global stocktake requires further discussion.

On a preambular paragraph emphasizing the need to enhance implementation at all levels and by all sectors of society to achieve the goals and targets of the GBF, a party suggested taking into consideration national circumstances.

Delegates addressed the set of paragraphs that would fall under planning. They discussed a request to parties to revise and update their NBSAPs, debating references to: the relevant guidance annexed to the document; and the GBF as the primary mechanism for national planning in accordance with CBD Article 6 (general measures for conservation and sustainable use). They further discussed the potential submission of revised NBSAPs through the Clearing-House Mechanism.

Delegates considered three alternative paragraphs on the use of headline indicators and agreed to work on the basis of the shorter version. They agreed to include a reference to supplementary and component indicators, and maintained language on taking into account different visions and approaches to achieving sustainable development in brackets. Agreement could not be reached on a paragraph on the review process.

The Contact Group started work on the section on reporting, including options on the submission of the seventh national report. Discussions will continue.

### ***In the Corridors***

With less than a week to go before the end of the Geneva Conference, it was time to step back from the weeds and take stock of the work done so far. The picture that the different bodies drew during the morning stocktake plenary was hardly a shining portrait—most contact groups have made some albeit limited progress, and document status ranged from mostly clear to many brackets. “Still, it’s becoming evident that some parties’ delaying tactics have paid off,” one seasoned delegate admitted. “With such a pace, we may find ourselves needing another session of the Working Group on the GBF.” The clear sign of meeting saturation came in the afternoon, where a contact group on DSI could hardly find a spot in the schedule for a meeting of Friends of the Co-Leads before their next session—in part because another informal group was meeting during the only available time.

So progress is slow. But it’s still progress. Some civil society groups are grateful for the inclusion of IPLCs throughout different items, which may help to secure them a voice across the framework. In addition, as the fight for a gender-specific target continues to gather steam, many have suggested focusing on convergences, resolving contentious issues afterwards. On the *modus operandi*, some delegates were heard saying, “the kinds of tactics we saw last week are unacceptable now. We can’t afford repeating ourselves, or else we’ll end up repeating our failure.”