

Geneva Biodiversity Conference Highlights: Friday, 25 March 2022

The Geneva Biodiversity Conference continued its work on Friday, with an SBSTTA plenary meeting in the morning to address marine and coastal biodiversity, the GBF monitoring framework for the post-2020 global biodiversity framework (GBF), and biodiversity and health. In the afternoon and evening contact groups under the Working Group on the GBF (WG2020) discussed GBF targets on reducing threats to biodiversity, and goals and overall structure respectively.

This daily report includes the deliberations of the SBSTTA plenary, the WG2020 Contact Group that met in the afternoon, and the two Contact Groups that met in the evening of Thursday, 24 March. The remaining WG2020 Contact Group will be summarized in the Bulletin on Saturday, 26 March.

SBSTTA Plenary

SBSTTA Chair Hesiquio Benítez Díaz (Mexico) opened the session, outlining the daily agenda and calling for focused discussions.

Marine and coastal biodiversity: Chair Benítez Díaz presented the documents under consideration (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.2 and CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.4/Rev.1), noting that two sets of draft recommendations were produced for discussion.

On a paragraph urging parties and inviting others to take action to conserve and sustainably use marine and coastal biodiversity to implement the GBF, particularly the most vulnerable marine ecosystems, addressing threats and pressures, delegates focused on a list of related threats. CHILE suggested “urgently” addressing threats such as plastic pollution, deep-sea mining, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and bycatch, overfishing, harmful fishery subsidies, and climate change effects. JAMAICA called for retaining language on unsustainable fishing. FRANCE proposed urgently addressing, *inter alia*, pollution, including plastic pollution; excess nutrients; anthropogenic noise; ocean acidification; and climate change effects, including oxygenation.

SWITZERLAND urged delegates to close the discussion on marine and coastal biodiversity, and focus on priority items directly related to the GBF. He suggested forwarding the two CRP documents directly to COP-15.

Following informal consultation among parties, SWITZERLAND suggested inviting parties to send their proposals to the Secretariat electronically, to be compiled and sent to COP-15 as bracketed text. He stressed the need to highlight the special circumstances under which this decision was taken, adding that it should not set a precedent for future work.

TURKEY, DENMARK, COLOMBIA, and CHILE stressed that without the opportunity to discuss, they reluctantly agree on the process forward. ECUADOR emphasized the need to ensure

there is no overlap between COP-15 and the fifth meeting of the Intergovernmental Conference on BBNJ, further cautioning against back-to-back meetings. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION and others stressed that this situation should not set a precedent. MOROCCO warned that COP-15 will be overburdened, noting that they accept the proposal due to exceptional circumstances. The PHILIPPINES and SOUTH AFRICA noted that the whole document should be bracketed, allowing parties time to express their concerns on the issues under discussion. CHINA suggested focusing on progress on the GBF, calling for concerted efforts.

The EU, supported by COLOMBIA and JAMAICA, suggested that SBSTTA request the Secretariat to conduct intersessional work on marine issues, subject to availability of resources. EGYPT noted that an extra day on marine issues for regional consultations could be allocated at COP-15.

BELGIUM queried whether additional time could be allocated in parallel to WG2020 discussions. Chair Benítez Díaz pointed to the meeting’s organization of work, noting that no group can meet in parallel with a WG2020 Contact Group.

Chair Benítez Díaz said that parties may send written submissions to the Secretariat on marine and coastal biodiversity until midnight of Friday, 25 March. The Secretariat will compile the comments and develop two L documents, which will remain bracketed and will be forwarded to COP-15.

GBF monitoring framework: Chair Benítez Díaz introduced the relevant CRP (CBD/SBSTTA/24/CRP.11). Andrew Stott (UK), Co-Chair of the Contact Group, noted good progress, but persistent bracketed text on definitions and criteria for indicators.

Chair Benítez Díaz noted that the plenary would not consider the last two appendices in the CRP, which are compilations of views on suggested indicators to be used in further intersessional work.

On a paragraph requesting the Secretariat to conduct a technical review of the proposed indicators of the monitoring framework for the GBF, BRAZIL requested that the Secretariat compile comments from parties and others on a technical review. Following a question by EGYPT, BRAZIL clarified that parties should be the ones tasked to perform the technical review. ARGENTINA supported a compilation of comments. Chair Benítez Díaz stressed the importance of having a document for the COP to use as a basis for consideration.

UK, supported by EGYPT, SWITZERLAND, the EU, COLOMBIA, and FRANCE, recommended a process whereby first, parties comment on annexes; second, the annexes feed into a technical review by the Secretariat; and third, the outcome of the process is available for consideration by COP-15.

BRAZIL disagreed with the Secretariat performing the technical review, citing concerns regarding the Secretariat’s lack of relevant capacity. After requests for clarity on who would carry out the technical review, the Secretariat evoked the possibility of a

workshop supported by parties and experts, and working with the rest of the UN system to complete the review. Chair Benítez Díaz, supported by UK and CHILE, suggested a potential technical workshop. BRAZIL requested a footnote clarifying the process between the present meeting and COP-15.

SWITZERLAND asked for language to make the outcomes of the process available to WG2020 for further work on the GBF. CHILE urged ensuring gender balance; and, with SOUTH AFRICA, requested that the review be “technical and scientific.” CANADA, supported by MEXICO, asked for clarity on whether the outcome will be available directly to the COP, or through the WG2020 Co-Chairs.

COSTA RICA suggested including language on focusing on an analysis of headline indicators with already existing methodologies, and their implementation feasibility.

Parties agreed to requesting the Secretariat, under the guidance of the SBSTTA Bureau, to compile comments from parties, other governments, and relevant stakeholders on the appendices and to facilitate a technical review ensuring consultation with parties, including, subject to availability of resources, through an expert workshop with experts nominated by parties. The proposed request also includes an analysis of indicators’ feasibility for use by parties, and invites the WG2020 Co-Chairs to take this scientific and technical review into account in their ongoing work.

SWITZERLAND emphasized the need to assure that SBSTTA’s work on indicators is duly taken on in the GBF. He requested clarification on work of the WG2020 during COP15. The Secretariat said the options for ongoing work of the WG2020 are yet to be decided.

Parties lifted a pending bracket in appendix 1 (proposed monitoring framework for the GBF). Regarding facilitating the use of headline indicators at the national level, COLOMBIA proposed stating that the development, use, and reporting of indicators at national level are enabled by effective national biodiversity monitoring systems and other national systems, which will require capacity building, technology transfer, and other support. COSTA RICA suggested strengthening developing parties’ capacities to effectively use the indicators, supported by effective provision of adequate means of implementation, in line with the Convention, including the establishment of a mechanism to increase capacity building and development, and technical and scientific capacities to fill monitoring gaps. SOUTH AFRICA said facilitation should include compilation of indicators. GERMANY suggested referring to capacity development in addition to capacity building.

The CRP was approved with amendments and brackets on new text. An L document will be developed.

Biodiversity and health: Chair Benítez Díaz noted that the Contact Group met three times and established a friends of the Co-Chairs group, co-facilitated by Helena Brown (Antigua and Barbuda) and Marina von Weissenberg (Finland), to address procedural matters and future steps.

Von Weissenberg reported on the informal group’s work, noting that it met twice and resolved many outstanding items. She said that few brackets remain in the document, including on paragraphs related to genetic resources, which are linked to the DSI discussions.

BELGIUM expressed disappointment on the outcome of the negotiation, stressing that, at a time of a pandemic of possible zoonotic origin, it is difficult to accept that the adoption of the global action plan on biodiversity and health will be postponed to COP-16.

On a paragraph “noting resolution 48/13 on the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, adopted by the Human Rights Council,” the US, supported by NEW ZEALAND, suggested rephrasing. The suggested language reads: “Noting resolution 48/13 entitled ‘the human right to a clean, healthy,

and sustainable environment.’” CHINA and MEXICO opposed, suggesting keeping the original language. NEW ZEALAND, supported by the UK and opposed by CHINA and MEXICO, suggested “recognizing that a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment is an important element of human rights.” AUSTRALIA requested bracketing the provision.

Noting divergence of views, SWITZERLAND suggested inviting parties to submit their comments and send the document to COP-15, similarly to the practice on marine and coastal biodiversity.

Chair Benítez Díaz proposed to proceed with discussions maintaining the brackets already contained in the document.

BRAZIL requested bracketing a paragraph which requests the Secretariat to complete work on biodiversity and health, including producing an updated version of the draft global action plan and targeted messages.

On a preambular paragraph emphasizing the role of genetic resources in research and development of health products, including in the context of addressing emerging diseases that have potential to become pandemics, and the importance of the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization, in line with the Convention, JAPAN suggested that this be done in a manner mutually supportive with other relevant international agreements and instruments. He further requested bracketing the reference to addressing emerging diseases that may become pandemics.

On a preambular paragraph noting ongoing efforts for a WHO instrument to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response, and the need to ensure alignment with the provisions of the Convention and its protocols, JAPAN suggested that the new instrument should be “consistent with” the provisions of the Convention and its protocols “and not run counter to their objectives and provisions.” NAMIBIA proposed also noting “ongoing negotiations to amend the International Health Regulations (2005).”

On an operative paragraph encouraging parties to strengthen compliance with ABS provisions to enhance the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources in the relevant health sectors, NAMIBIA requested adding genetic resources’ “associated information.”

On an operative paragraph inviting the Quadripartite for One Health to take into account the linkages between health and biodiversity, and the need for the One Health approach, among other holistic approaches, NAMIBIA suggested adding the need “to recognize socioeconomic inequities existing between developing and developed parties, the health inequities, and the principles of equity and solidarity.”

On an operative paragraph requesting the Secretariat to produce an updated version of the draft global action plan based on inputs received from parties and other relevant stakeholders, NAMIBIA proposed adding that it should “prioritize issues of equity, particularly through fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources and associated information.”

All the new suggestions were bracketed. With these amendments, the CRP was approved and an L document will be developed.

WG2020 Contact Group 2

Co-Leads Teona Karchava (Georgia) and Rosemary Paterson (New Zealand) led the discussions on targets 1-8 of the GBF on reducing threats to biodiversity based on a non-paper.

On **Target 4**, which addresses management actions for the recovery and conservation of species and their genetic diversity, including through conservation and effectively managing human-wildlife interactions, the main points of divergence included whether to refer to:

- *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation;
- conserving the genetic diversity of wild and domesticated, cultivated, all, or native species; and
- managing human-wildlife interactions or avoiding/reducing human-wildlife conflict.

Many delegates suggested referring to both *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation. A regional group, supported by many and opposed by some, suggested referring to *in situ* conservation supported by *ex situ* conservation.

Regarding conserving genetic diversity, many supported referring to “wild and domesticated” species. Some parties suggested referring to “native and domesticated.” Others insisted retaining “cultivated.” A party preferred “native.” A few parties opted for “native, wild, and domesticated.” Delegates agreed to delete the reference to “all species.”

Some parties suggested retaining the reference to reducing human-wildlife conflict. A party suggested “effectively managing” human-wildlife conflict, to which a regional group added that this should be done “for the benefit of both wildlife and humans.” Others preferred enhancing human-wildlife coexistence. A party proposed “minimizing harm to native wildlife from human-wildlife interactions.” Some delegates suggested deleting the reference altogether, noting that the target focuses on species’ conservation and recovery.

Some parties suggested reference to preventing human-induced extinction of non-threatened species. A party proposed ensuring the recovery, conservation, and population abundance of native species. A regional group, supported by some and opposed by others, suggested restoring genetically depleted populations. A party suggested maintaining species’ adaptive potential in addition to conserving their genetic diversity. A few delegates suggested preventing activities that damage ecosystems and habitats, and ensuring the customary rights of, and access to and use by, IPLCs. A party noted that a general clause on IPLCs should be placed in the preamble.

A party suggested including numerical elements in the target based on the average population abundance of depleted species increasing by a certain percentage, as well as reducing the risk of human-driven species’ extinctions by a certain percentage.

Some parties urged to keep the target clear and concise. A regional group cautioned that many elements that should be under the goals and milestones have been introduced under the target. Others noted that all suggestions should remain in brackets.

On **Target 5** (on ensuring that the harvesting, trade, and use of terrestrial, freshwater, and marine wild species is sustainable and legal), Co-Lead Paterson noted that there was consensus on customary sustainable use, and divergent views on human health and biopiracy, among others. An initial request to move through the target clause by clause was largely ignored.

One party, supported by a regional group, requested returning to a previous formulation to “eliminate all harvesting, trade, and use of wild terrestrial, freshwater, and marine species that is illegal, unsustainable, or unsafe while safeguarding the customary sustainable use by IPLCs.” Parties suggested a number of additions, all of which were bracketed. These included, *inter alia*: reference to “captive breeding”; language on non-target species; supporting human health with “all living beings on Mother Earth”; an exception for endangered species; including coastal species; and a provision to prevent and eliminate biopiracy and other forms of illegal access and transfer of genetic resources.

One party said the use of the word “legal” regarding harvesting opens a possibility to legalize activities that may be unsustainable or harmful to biodiversity. Another noted that plants experience a higher level of exploitation than animals, calling for their inclusion. A party stressed the need to include eggs, fry, parts, and derivatives.

There was also support for minimizing impacts on non-target species and ecosystems, and to include the notion of effective regulation. Many objected to the exemption of endangered species, saying it may facilitate the overexploitation of endemic species. Some urged to include the One Health approach.

Many parties gave their support to the original formulation and stressed that the target should be as concise as possible. One party suggested that elimination of additional text be based on whether the addition supports the prevention of overexploitation.

An observer stressed the need to emphasize pathogen spillover concerning trade in wildlife species. He added that the target should address overexploitation, suggesting using “exploitation” rather than “harvesting.”

On **Target 6** (on invasive alien species (IAS) pathways, introduction and establishment, and eradication or control), many parties supported the initial text suggested by Co-Leads.

One party group suggested alternative language to “eliminate or reduce the impacts caused by IAS on native biodiversity, by managing pathways for the introduction of alien species, preventing the introduction and establishment of all priority invasive ones, reducing the rate of introduction and establishment of other non or potentially invasive ones by at least 50%, and eradicating or controlling IAS.”

Views diverged on a number of points, including whether to: “eradicate” or “effectively manage” IAS; reduce rates of introduction and establishment “by at least 50 per cent” or “significantly”; and focus on nationally identified priority species and sites. On the latter, some parties suggested that prioritization should be on IAS, while others suggested qualifying sites with “for biodiversity,” or replacing them with “ecosystems.” Other points of contention included whether a reference to the rate of introduction of alien species should be deleted, and whether parties should prevent “and” reduce, or prevent “or” reduce IAS.

Parties and observers made a number of other contributions, such as including the notion of detection of IAS for control and elimination; addressing safe management tools; and taking into account the “coverage and impact” of IAS.

On **Target 1** (on ensuring that all areas globally are under integrated, biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning), Contact Group Co-Lead Karchava listed areas of persisting contention, including on whether to list ecosystems, namely terrestrial, freshwater, marine, and coastal, or to refer to land and sea areas. One party suggested resolving this by referencing “all ecosystems globally.” Co-Lead Karchava also drew attention to brackets around “intact and wilderness areas” and divergences on whether to add areas of high biodiversity values. Several interventions reiterated these divergent views and the brackets remained unresolved.

One party group proposed the following alternative text, which was bracketed to allow others time to consider it further: “address land and sea-use change retaining critical and vulnerable ecosystems, and intact and wilderness areas, minimizing loss to other natural and semi-natural ecosystems as well as territories governed or managed by Indigenous peoples, and ensure that all land and marine areas globally are under integrated biodiversity-inclusive spatial planning, while safeguarding the interest and rights of IPLCs in accordance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and international human rights law.”

One party, opposed by some, called for ensuring unavoidable impacts from infrastructure are minimized. Other suggestions included adding references to: sustainable development and poverty eradication; effective management processes; sustaining ecosystem services, avoiding fragmentation, and reducing pressures on vulnerable ecosystems; and respecting or securing IPLC rights.

SBI Contact Group on Reporting, Assessment, and Review

Co-Chairs Gillian Guthrie (Jamaica) and Andrew Stott (UK) guided the discussions, which took place on Thursday, 24 March, in the evening. Delegates addressed the revised and restructured version of the non-paper containing options to enhance planning, reporting, and review mechanisms with a view to strengthening the implementation of the Convention.

Delegates resumed their discussions with a number of alternative paragraphs relating to headline indicators in the section on reporting. They agreed to work on the basis of a longer version with a number of additions and limitations, including on giving flexibility to developing country parties in light of their capacities. Some parties indicated that they are not ready to agree to a provision requiring use of headline indicators unless they can reach agreement on the required means of implementation. The provision remains bracketed.

Delegates debated at length a section on review, discussing various paragraphs, including on: overall ambition; information to inform the review; and timing. Parties made a number of detailed proposals, including on a list of sources of information and restructured the section in two parts, one on ambition and the other on the periodic review.

A number of delegates indicated that they could not agree to a paragraph on ambition and proposed to review the level of achievement by parties of GBF goals and targets. Some proposed deleting the paragraph on ambition and incorporating a brief provision on information necessary for the review, including the information compiled for the GBO, in the paragraph on the review. A number of parties requested returning to a detailed provision listing information sources; some proposed listing them in a footnote or annex. Delegates also debated and provided proposals with regard to who should conduct the review, ranging from the Secretariat to the SBI. The entire section, the proposed paragraphs, and parts thereof remain bracketed.

A number of developing countries urged considering the section on means for implementation. One developing country, supported by a number of others, proposed an opening paragraph that: the COP decide that developed country parties shall provide financial resources and other means of implementation, including capacity building, technology transfer, and scientific and technical cooperation, to enable implementation by developing country parties of the enhanced multidimensional approach to planning, monitoring, reporting, and review of the GBF, in accordance with CBD Article 20 (financial resources). Developed country representatives proposed changing the operative word to “invite” developed countries to provide such means of implementation, and asked to bracket references to developed and developing countries respectively along with other proposed changes. A number of developing country representatives expressed disappointment regarding the suggested changes, which remain in brackets. One delegate proposed an additional paragraph urging developed country parties to fulfill their commitments under CBD Articles 20 and 21 (financial mechanism).

Delegates also debated splitting a paragraph on donors in a separate request to the GEF and an invitation to other donors, including tracking contributions of non-state actors. A number of provisions remain bracketed.

Delegates further addressed sections on stakeholder and non-state actor engagement. Discussions continued into the night.

SBI Contact Group on the Post-2020 Implementation Plan and Capacity-Building Action Plan for the Cartagena Protocol

The SBI contact group on the post-2020 Cartagena Protocol implementation plan and capacity-building action plan, co-chaired by Rita Andorkó (Hungary) and Rigobert Ntep (Cameroon), met

for a single evening session on Thursday, 24 March. Recalling that the Contact Group had met three times during the first part of SBI-3, Co-Chair Ntep pointed delegates to document CBD/SBI/3/CRP.14, which is the result of that deliberation and, as requested by parties, splits the implementation and capacity-building plan into two separate plans. The document contains a draft recommendation to COP-15; the draft implementation plan, including a table structured around goals, objectives, indicators, and outcomes; and the draft capacity-building action plan, including sections on goals, key areas for capacity building, capacity-building activities, indicators, outcome, and actors. The section on actors, as well as parts of the one on indicators, are bracketed.

Delegates discussed the indicators for the capacity-building action plan, which were welcomed by many. Some asked to keep the indicators simple and focused on LMOs. One party asked to refer to measurement of progress instead.

Delegates proposed adding references to specific indicators, including on: developing and updating goals; LMOs resulting from new techniques; information on experiences and lessons learned in the implementation of the Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress; monitoring of illegal transboundary movement of LMOs; and IPLCs.

Co-Chair Andorkó asked delegates whether they wanted to keep the decision as currently drafted or separate it into two parts, one on the implementation plan and the other on the capacity-building action plan. Most delegates preferred separate decisions, including a party that had previously maintained that there should be a single decision. The Secretariat was tasked with creating two separate decisions based on the current text.

Delegates then discussed the column on actors in the capacity-building plan. Many did not see the need for a separate column on actors, while one regional group preferred maintaining it. They then discussed including a provision relating to actors in the draft decision, such as encouraging parties to identify relevant actors to support the implementation of the capacity-building action plan. A shorter and a longer version of the provision remain bracketed. Remaining issues will be discussed in plenary.

In the Corridors

“Dear delegates, we’re still in March,” one wry voice rang out in the afternoon plenary on Friday. “It is far too early to decorate Christmas trees.” Yet some unexplainable holiday spirit seems to have taken hold of parties in the past days: discussions saw documents festooned with additions, and more give than take on “streamlined” text.

Movement remains slow. The morning’s SBSTTA plenary couldn’t address all of its intended documents. In the afternoon, target-by-target navigation rapidly transformed clear text into the Co-Leads’ worst nightmare: an overload of amendments—all bracketed, of course. “This isn’t the time to get steamrolled by every delegate who wants to add an ornament to the tree,” a participant grumbled over cheesecake. “This is a party-led process, but unless facilitators crack the whip, we might not make it to the plenary unscathed.”

Yet some strategic voices reminded those who were disappointed that this dynamic, much like Christmas, is a tradition—something hard to avoid, but that can still lead to celebration. One seasoned delegate suggested that, so late in the game, it’s time to pick the battles that can be won and wait until the COP to settle the rest. “If we can agree on goals, targets, and milestones before Kunming, we’ll be OK for the rest,” they mused. Here’s hoping that the holiday community spirit prevails before the final plenary.